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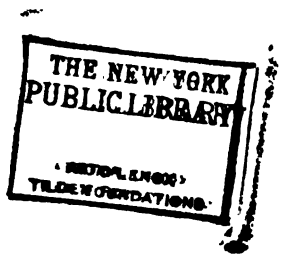
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"What is it ?"
"A lady on fire."
ORIGINAL ETCHING BY JOHN SLOAN.

The Works of

CHARLES PAUL DE KOCK

With a General Introduction by

JULES CLARETIE

v. 24

ADHÉMAR

Translated into English by

EDITH MARY NORRIS

THE FREDERICK J. QUINBY COMPANY

NEW YORK LONDON PARIS

Edition

Limited to One Thousand Copies

Number 222

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PRINTED ON OLD STRATFORD PAPER MADE BY
MITTINEAGUE PAPER COMPANY

Plimpton Press
Printers and Binders, Norwood, Mass.
U.S.A.

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CHAPTER I

A Meeting of Four

Five o'clock in the afternoon was just striking as a young exquisite, with a good figure and a very agreeable expression of countenance, although at times his big blue eyes expressed a decided liking for raillery, entered the café which is situated on the corner of the Faubourg Poissonière and the boulevard, on the right as you come from the boulevards.

This young man glanced around the first room, then he went into those which lay beyond, saying to himself,—

"Nobody here! Not a single one of them has come. Not a single one of them will come, perhaps; for in five years one has plenty of time to forget an appointment. However, I remembered it. I am positively certain they have not all joined the great majority, for I met Dodichet barely two months ago; and I have seen Dubotté at the theatre within the past week; Lucien is the only one of whom I have seen or heard nothing for a long time now. Well, I must wait a bit. They have still a quarter of an hour's grace!"

The young gentleman, by name Adhémar

Montbrun, seated himself at a table, took up a newspaper, ordered a glass of chartreuse, and read a criticism of a piece which had had a great success on the evening before, but which the journalist damned because the author was not one of his friends; which, fortunately, did not prevent the play from making its way and having a long run, as the public was beginning to take at their true value the articles of these Aristarchuses of the press, who have, as a general thing, taken for their motto, "Nobody has any wit but we and our friends."

Adhémar had not been reading the paper for two minutes when a gentleman who entered the café came straight to where he was seated and slapped him on the shoulder, saying,—

"Well, here I am too, old fellow! as prompt as the sun — that is, when he shines. You see, I didn't forget our appointment. Good-day, Adhémar, I'm delighted to see you again. Are you well? I am perfectly so, as you may see for yourself. Everyone says that I look thriving. That bothers me sometimes, for I've noticed that your very prosperous people often look stupid too; but I hope I don't go so far as that!"

This second personage was a man of thirty who quite looked his age, for he was already rather stout; rather under than over medium height, a plain, red, and always jolly-looking face, with a perfect thicket of curly light hair, china-blue eyes as round as those of a cat, and immense mutton-chop whiskers. Such

was Philémon Dubotté, who thought himself a very pretty fellow and paid court to all the ladies, but was very neglectful of his wife, who, on the contrary, adored him and overwhelmed him with caresses. But this is often the way with the ladies, the colder one is with them, the more ardent their affection becomes; as far as that is concerned, you will tell me, they are so, perhaps, in order to reawaken their husband's love.

Adhémar pressed the newcomer's hand.

"Good-day, Philémon, sit you down there. Yes, you look so well that it's delightful to see you!"

"Believe me, I not only look well, but I am so —I'm as sound as the Porte Saint-Denis! By the way, is the Porte Saint-Denis still standing?"

"Yes, of course!"

"They are demolishing so many things! Well, then, I was correct in saying I am as sound as the Porte Saint-Denis."

"I see you have a good memory!"

"And why shouldn't I have one?"

"In five years one may forget many things!"

"In love, possibly, but not in friendship."

"People forget in friendship as they do in love. Memory is one of the rarest things on earth, especially the memory of the heart."

"There you go! just the same as ever; you have confidence in nothing."

"I'm not to blame for the fact that my confidence has always been misplaced. Time deprives

us of our illusions, and in five years I've lost a devilish lot of them."

"As for me, I have lost nothing at all. I still worship the fair sex, who, I am bound to say, return the compliment, too ardently sometimes, even. For I have a wife — you don't know my wife, but you must make her acquaintance — my dear fellow! she worships me, she idolizes me — it is a veritable passion! When I am away from her for half a day, she no longer exists, she doesn't eat, she languishes, she even carries it so far as to weep. When I come in I am obliged to scold her. I say to her, 'Eléonore' she's named Eléonore — I say 'Why, Nonore, what does this mean? What, I can't absent myself, stay a little late with my friends, without finding you in tears on my return?' She will kiss me and say, 'I thought you had fallen from the top of an omnibus; my dear, I beg of you don't go on the outside, to those horrid three-sous places. Go inside, Philémon, I beg of you, go inside, and you will oblige me very much.' That's how my wife is, and I assure you it is extremely tiresome to be loved to such a point as that."

"You complain that your wife is too fond of you! but that will not last forever."

"I should hope not,—poor Nonore! if she did but know how unworthy I am of such adoration, for I am a thorough rascal. I can't see a pretty face without making eyes at it. But there's Lucien; come, I really think our party will be complete."

The person who came towards the table where the two friends were sitting was a young man of twenty-six, tall, slight, and extremely thin; his face was pale, but his features were very handsome, his eyes very soft, and his manners were such as to inspire those who spoke to him with interest. His dress was respectable, but was not indicative of easy circumstances; his black coat, which was buttoned from top to bottom, had been brushed and rebrushed a score of times; no one would have dared to lay hold of the tail of this coat for fear it might remain in his hand detached from the garment to which it belonged. His black necktie allowed one to perceive only the slightest tip of his collar; his hat seemed to have been cleaned with water, but his gray trousers had not the slightest stain of mud; and his shoes, if they were not varnished, were at least carefully blacked. This third personage was called Lucien Grischard.

As soon as he perceived Lucien at a distance Adhémar rose and extended his hand as the thin young man drew near, exclaiming,—

"How do you do, Lucien, my dear fellow? How pleased I am to see you again, for it is quite a long time — nearly two years — since I have had that pleasure!"

"That is true, Monsieur Adhémar, and I also am delighted to see you, for I had impatiently awaited this day which was to bring us together."

"And why do you call me monsieur now? and

not Adhémar, as formerly? Am I not still your old schoolfellow?"

"Oh, excuse me — but that is so long ago, and then in the past five years you have made a success in literature, as a playwright; you have become a celebrity; while I — well, I have remained altogether in the shade."

"My dear Lucien, if fame were to part us from all our friends, we should have to repulse it, instead of desiring it. I don't think mine has risen to such a height as yet as to make any one envious."

"Don't think for a moment that I experienced any such feeling on hearing of your successes. On the contrary, I rejoiced and said to myself, 'He's making his way, at least.'"

While this third friend was talking with Adhémar, Philémon, the fair man, was examining him with persistent attention, and the sight of the threadbare coat and the water-cleansed hat did not seem to give a very lively impulse to his friendship; however, he also shook hands with Lucien and said to him, almost in the tone of a protector,—

"Good-day, Lucien, good-day, my dear fellow. Confound it, you haven't grown fat since I last saw you."

"I can't say so much for you, Philémon, for you are almost as round as a barrel."

"A barrel! — that's putting it rather strongly, but, after all, I would much rather resemble a barrel than a gun barrel."

Instead of being vexed by this comparison, Lucien shouted with laughter, while Adhémar exclaimed,—

"Well, messieurs, how's this? School comrades meeting after five years only to say sharp things to each other? is that how we should meet again after a lustre has passed over our heads? and have you become so susceptible as to get angry at a joke?"

"Oh, I'm not angry at all!" answered Lucien, "quite the contrary, you saw how Philémon's word made me laugh."

"I confess," admitted Dubotté, "that I cannot bear to be compared to a barrel. Any sobriquet you like, except that! But I bear Lucien no grudge. Come, sit you down beside us, my dear fellow; you are going to take something."

"Thanks, but it seems to me our party is not yet complete; some one is missing, and that is Dodichet."

"Oh, we mustn't count on him. When did Dodichet ever keep his word? Does he know what it is to keep a promise? He's a good fellow, but he's a crazy pate, a featherbrain, who always has a thousand plans of which he never puts a single one into execution, and who never has the slightest remembrance in the morning of what he has said the evening before."

"Deuce take it, Philémon, you judge him too harshly."

"I only say what is true. However, for five years I have seen very little of him, he may have amended."

"No," said Adhémar, "Dodichet is still the same. I have several times had occasion to meet him, and I have seen with pain that our old comrade Dodichet had not become more reasonable. He was in a position where he had every chance of succeeding, for he is no fool and he had some money from his parents; but he thinks of nothing but amusing himself and having what he calls 'a good time'; but he is not always successful in this and sometimes it costs him dear. Now, I believe, he's almost ruined, and, unluckily, he has not yet decided on any profession."

"Poor Dodichet!" said Lucien thoughtfully, "then he must be unhappy!"

"Unhappy! he? why, that he never will be. He laughs at everything, sees everything through rose-colored spectacles — and is persuaded that he will one day possess a hotel, a carriage and a hundred thousand francs income. He has the happiest disposition imaginable!"

"Why, here he is, by Jove!" cried Philémon. "Yes, it really is he; he has remembered our appointment. Then he has a better memory than I gave him credit for."

A new personage had, in fact, just entered the café. He was a man of from twenty-six to twenty-seven years of age, of medium height, well set-up, brown

hair, a face inclined to be red, lively eyes, a turned-up nose and an enormous mouth — in short, he looked like one who would be jolly company. His dress was rather eccentric; his trousers being immensely wide at the legs and very tight over the hips, his waistcoat of the most impossible plaid, and his coat so short that it came only a few inches below the waist. On his head was a gray hat, of which the shape was irrecognizable, but which looked rather like a snail shell. To complete his get-up, he carried a light cane with an ivory handle, which he was constantly thrusting into his mouth, or rubbing his nose or his ear with it. Such was M. Fanfan Dodichet, who, on coming into the café, began by twirling his cane in such a manner as to burst a paper which an elderly habitue of the café was reading while enjoying his fish.

The old gentlemen raised his head, and looked angrily at the man who had torn his paper; and Dodichet, instead of excusing himself, laughed in the old man's face, and said to him,—

"They'll give you the 'Tintamarre,' it's a great deal more amusing than that. I am sure the one you are reading is very tiresome — I saw that as I came in; I said to myself, 'There's a gentleman who's feeling the need of changing his paper, I'm going to furnish him with an occasion to do so.'"

Then, without awaiting an answer, Dodichet scanned all the tables at which people were seated, and perceiving at length those whom he sought,

he immediately exclaimed, as though he had been in his own house,—

"Why, here they are! these are they—oh, fortunate destiny!"

Then he began to sing,—

Les montagnards, les montagnards,
Les montagnards sont réunis!

"Do stop your noise, Dodichet!" said Dubotté, without taking the hand which the newcomer extended to him; "you will compromise us. What do you look like singing like that in a café full of people, they'll be giving you two sous next."

"Well, if everybody here were to give me two sous that would make a nice little round sum; but our handsome blond is always afraid of being compromised. He's immense, is Dubotté! Dubotté, you produce the same effect upon me as the sun, upon my honor! I can't look at you without squinting. But you are not the only one here! Good-day, messieurs; you see, I haven't forgotten the appointment we made five years ago. That surprises you, doesn't it? Well, upon my word of honor, it astonishes me also! Ah, here is Lucien, that good Lucien, whom I haven't seen, I think, since our last meeting. Give me your hand, Lucien.

That hand, that pretty hand."

"By Jove! is he going to sing again? If he is, I am off."

"No, Phœbus, no, don't be afraid; I won't sing any more,— not to please you, but because I want to talk with Adhémar and Lucien. Ah, Adhémar! he's a friend indeed, I am glad to say; he always rises to the occasion. But Dubotté, he always scents it when anyone wants to ask a service of him, and then he's off like a stag. I said stag, but the comparison is a little risky, perhaps, seeing that our friend is a married man; but so much the worse, the word slipped out and I shan't take it back."

"Oh, your word doesn't offend me, Dodichet. When one has a wife like mine one is above such jokes as those."

"You are satisfied with your wife; so much the better, I am pleased to hear it. But now tell me, messieurs, what will you all take? I feel very thirsty myself."

"Well, ask for some beer."

"Beer! oh, no, that's too common; say punch, rather."

"Nobody takes punch before dinner."

"Why not? there is no such thing as time for brave fellows like us. Waiter, some punch— rum; see that it's carefully mixed, tell them it's for a connoisseur. And you, Lucien, my dear fellow! you'll take a glass of punch, won't you?—it'll warm you up and set you going."

"No, I thank you, I will take nothing—I don't care about anything."

"Come now, by Jove! you must take some

punch with us; remember, it is I who offer it to you."

"But I can answer for it, it will not be he who will pay for it," said Adhémar quite low.

However, the punch was brought and each one decided to take some. Dodichet immediately poured himself a second glass, as he hummed,—

I must taste it again, to be sure it is right.

But Adhémar silenced him by opening the conversation.

"Messieurs, all four of us born at Troyes—"

"The country of sausages," remarked Dodichet.

"Ah! Dodichet are you going to interrupt Adhémar?"

"Not at all. I merely wished to confirm his statement that we were all four natives of Troyes. Go on, Adhémar."

"Five years ago we all met together in this same café; I was then twenty-four years of age. I had been in Paris for some time; but Philémon Dubotté had just arrived here, as also Lucien; Dodichet had then only dissipated in this gay city the inheritance of one of his uncles. We were comrades at college, and all four of us finding ourselves here, do you remember what we said?"

"Perfectly. We each cried, 'I want to do something; to make a fortune, a position, and I only ask five years to do it in.'"

"That's perfectly correct! and we settled then

that we would all four meet here at the end of five years, in order to learn if we had all succeeded, all got there."

"Very good!"

"Now, let each one tell where he is and whether he has arrived at the end which he proposed to himself. You begin, Philémon."

"Oh, yes, Dubotté must begin, because he's the eldest. Go on, beauteous blond."

"The eldest? that's not at all sure."

"Oh, between ourselves there's no need to cheat — at college we all knew each other's age."

"Yes, but we are not at college now."

"Come, that's good, that is! I should like to have that framed. Dubotté, you are turned thirty-one."

"Turned, well, only just! for three months."

"That makes you thirty-one and a quarter years, then."

"You, Dodichet, are at least twenty-eight."

"I don't deny my age, twenty-seven and a half years. Adhémar, twenty-nine, and Lucien, twenty-six, he is our youngest. That is easily seen, easily understood. I move that Phœbus continue."

"I shall be happy to do so. Messieurs, I cannot complain of fortune. Having obtained a place in the ministry of the interior, my assiduity, my zeal, my fine writing, caused me to be promptly promoted. I did not delay my marriage; I had found a very pleasing young lady who had a very

nice little dowry; I was presented to her, and that was enough for me; she declared that she would be happy to marry a man employed in the Interior department, and our marriage took place. I have only to congratulate myself upon it; my wife adores me; she sees only with my eyes. My salary is ample, and I can live agreeably; I may therefore say that I have got there, that my position is assured; but yet, no, messieurs, I have not yet reached the limit of my aspiration, for I have some ambition; I should like to be sub-prefect, or, at least, the head of an office; but before long I hope to arrive at that. 'Dixi.'"

"That is understood. Now, Adhémar, it is your turn."

"Messieurs, I will be brief; I wished to be a writer and I have written novels, and have employed my pen for the stage, I have produced plays which have been more successful than I had hoped; fortune, in this respect, has always shown a favoring face. I have earned a good deal of money. But I have not been fortunate in love; I have loved women ardently, and when they said they loved no one but me, I always believed them until I had proof to the contrary; but this proof came so often as to disillusion me. I then made a study of the ladies, found they were all coquettes, and that, as a natural consequence, there was not one of them whose fidelity I could depend upon. This rendered me for some time a misanthrope,

or, rather, a woman-hater; but later on I said to myself that I would take the world as I found it, and content myself by forming with women only those connections which had pleasure as their sole end. Still, I feel that I was made to love truly, and that I should have been happy in being so loved. Here is where I stand: I have everything to satisfy my vanity, and I have plenty of money, but my heart is not satisfied, and, according to my way of thinking, no one has really succeeded who is not happy."

"Very good!" cried Dodichet, "now it is my turn. Messieurs, very different to Adhémar, I consider myself extremely fortunate, for I pass my life in amusing myself. However, I must confess that I have not yet attained an assured position; I have tried so many occupations, in a free and easy way, that they might call me a universal man! I have had situations, clerkships; but I never stayed anywhere, I don't know why — that is to say — yes, I know very well why. Carried away by my love of joking, I was always looking to see what good trick I could play next; as a clerk in a novelty store, I found a way to mix all the goods; to put on one shelf what ought to be on another; then when customers came no one could find anything in its place, they shouted and fumed, and I just laughed like a fool. Then, as a clerk in a government office, I played a practical joke on my chief which cost me my place — some people can't

see a joke. During all these adventures, I must confess that so far from making money I was spending, little by little, all I had inherited. But I still have some rich relations; I am going to settle down, I have found my true vocation; it is the theatre. Yes, messieurs, some day I shall distinguish myself on the stage; I have not yet arrived at that, it is true, but you will see me there and in a year, here, in this same café, I wish you all to come and compliment me on my talent and my success."

"So be it!" said Adhémar, "and now it is for Lucien to speak."

"I must begin, messieurs, by telling you that I have not been at all successful — and that, although I have not amused myself; I have worked — worked very hard indeed — I have tried several little commercial ventures, but I have not been successful; often, too, I have been deceived, exploited by those who should merely have been my partners and who kept all the profits for themselves. But I have not yet lost courage, I have just invented a new kind of pin for ladies; something tells me it will take. I must also tell you that I am in love, and that the father of her I love will not give his daughter except to a man who already has a good establishment."

"What, my dear Lucien! you are in love, really in love?" said Adhémar. "Ah, that is what prevents you from getting on! You must never take

that feeling seriously, or you will be duped; it will make you sad and unhappy and every one will laugh at you."

"Pardon me, Adhémar, but I do not think as you do. Far from love rendering me unhappy, it is my only consolation, my only hope; it sustains me in adversity, for I am loved by her whom I love, and a word, a smile from her will make me forget the weariness of a whole week!"

"Why look you, the fellow is loved," said Philémon, "he has vanquished the young girl's heart, in spite of her father's beard; I know how that is myself."

"Lucien, do you want me to abduct your sweetheart? to play a good trick on the papa? You needn't bother yourself about it. I'm quite at your service."

"No, Dodichet, thanks; she whom I love is not one of those young ladies who allow themselves to be abducted; she is virtuous, well brought up. She will give herself only to her husband, and if she were otherwise I should not love her."

"Very good! but what is this barbarous father who will not approve his daughter's choice?"

"Oh, he is a miser, a human crab; a man who esteems nothing but money. You will understand by that, that he won't give his daughter a dowry; on the contrary he would rather exact one from his son-in-law."

"And what is this grab-all's occupation."

"He has none, according to what he says; but, between ourselves, I think he lends money at usury; lends it for a short time, and at a high rate of interest. He's rich, but he's always complaining of the hardness of the times; unfortunately for himself he is married for the second time to a woman much younger than himself and who must have brought him money; he would not have married her without that. But this lady sometimes wishes to have some relaxation, to receive company; and that throws M. Mirotaine into despair, for he wants to suppress all expense."

"Mirotaine, did you say, Lucien? Why I know him. Yes, Mirotaine, a former tip-staff, who lives now in the Rue Saint-Louis, in the Marais."

"The same! so you know this gentlemen! Well, Philémon, do you think I have overdrawn his portrait?"

"No, not at all, he's a skinflint of the first quality. He invited me to go to his parties, but I learned that he offered for refreshments in summer time — liquorice water!"

"Oh, that's delightful; and in winter?"

"Ah, that was worse still; in winter he gave hot liquorice water. You may imagine that was not very enticing to me, so I did not go to his parties."

"Cold liquorice water and hot liquorice water!" cried Dodichet; "it is unbelievable; does this man deal in liquorice wood?"

"It is a pity, for his second wife isn't half a bad

sort; I would willingly have paid court to her, but I lacked courage to face the liquorice water."

"And his daughter Juliette, is she not charming?"

"I don't know, for I have never seen her."

"Her stepmother greatly desires to marry her. As she is very coquettish, I think she is jealous of her stepdaughter's beauty; she is looking for husbands everywhere; I know for a fact that she has even applied to a dealer in toilet articles who arranges marriages."

"What, do you mean to say that dealers in commodities of the toilet make marriages?"

"A good many, my dear Dodichet; a good many! You can understand that it benefits them; they stipulate in their conditions that it is they who shall furnish the presents which the future husband makes to his bride. If the future husband has no money to buy the wedding basket, they agree to make it on credit, quite certain that it will be paid for when the bridegroom receives the dowry."

"Why, that isn't half stupid, after all; I have a great mind to set to work and make some marriages myself. Do you know the name of this Hymen's go-between?"

"Madame Putiphar."

"The devil! that's a promising name. I must tell her to find me a millionnaire, and I will share the dowry with her. At any rate your M. Miroton—Mirotaine is an ugly crow — he smells of onions,

I'll wager; I really must play him some good trick."

"Dodichet, I beg of you don't do anything that will compromise Juliette, or that will not advance my business."

"Your business! and you flatter yourself, Lucien, that your pins will give you the means of marrying this damsel?"

"If I make money by them, yes; but it will be long first and, meanwhile, the dealer in toilet articles will find some one who will be enticed by Juliette's attractions to consent to marry her without a dowry."

"Poor Lucien, give me your address, I shall go and look at your pins; I'll try to puff them."

"My lodging is a very modest one; I live on the sixth floor in the Rue Jemmapes, opposite the bridge at the corner of the Rue du Temple."

"Well, messieurs, I see we must part without any one of us being able to boast that he has attained the end he had proposed to himself."

"Messieurs, I demand a respite of one year. In one year I shall make my way at the theatre! I shall have got there!"

"And I," said Lucien, "in another twelve months shall perhaps have succeeded in my enterprises. I shall have established a little business."

"I shall either be sub-prefect or head of a department."

"So be it, messieurs," said Adhémar, "the respite

of one year is accorded; as for me, I don't think my position will be changed in any wise."

Philémon rose and left the table, saying,—

"Messieurs, you are very kind, but my wife is expecting me to dinner, and if I stay any longer, I shall find her weeping into her soup. Good-by, till I see you again, and may the fates be propitious to you."

The handsome fair man departed.

"He's taken himself off without paying," said Dodichet, "our friend does not stand on ceremony."

"He must have forgotten," said Lucien, "but we three will pay for all."

"Oh, confound it; I perceive I have forgotten my purse," said Dodichet, feeling in all his pockets.

Adhémar smiled and hastened to pay the waiter, saying,—

"Messieurs, permit me to be your host, which will afford me great pleasure. My dear Lucien, you know my address, pray come and see me sometimes."

"Thank you, my dear Adhémar, I shall remember your kind invitation. Good-by, Dodichet."

Lucien Grischard also departed.

"He is proud," said Adhémar, as he left the café with Dodichet, "he won't come to see me because he is poor, and he does not wish that any one should do him a service."

"Well, he is wrong there; thank Providence!

I am not like that," cried Dodichet, " one mustn't be proud with one's friends. So I am not afraid, Adhémar, to say to you, 'I have forgotten my purse, lend me a hundred sous, I will return them at the earliest opportunity.'"

" My dear Dodichet, I like to oblige my friends very much; but you abuse my willingness. Several times I have lent you hundred sous pieces, that you were always going to pay me back, and you haven't paid me yet a single one."

" Well, now listen, lend me two hundred sous, and I will pay you back a hundred sous right on the spot."

Adhémar could not refrain from laughing, and, urged by this characteristic speech, again lent Dodichet a hundred sous.

CHAPTER II

A Burning Gown

Let us leave Philémon Dubotté to return to his wife, making soft eyes at all the pretty women he meets on his way; let us leave Lucien Grischard to dream of a way of making money without departing from the paths of honor; let us leave M. Fanfan Dodichet seeking what trick he can play M. Mirotaine, who regales his guests with liquorice water — and let us follow Adhémar, who has no other plan in his head than the plot of a comedy that he is working out.

Our author walked rather slowly along the boulevard, taking little notice of the passers-by; but suddenly he ran, or, rather, he flew towards a lady who was half a dozen steps in front of him, and whose gown had just burst into a flame on coming in contact with a burning match which one of those gentlemen who have the noble habit of smoking as they walk had thrown down, after lighting his cigar or pipe, without taking the trouble to step on it and extinguish it altogether; which would, at least, protect ladies from accidents which sometimes prove very dangerous; but what does it matter to a smoker that a dress burns and that a lady burns also? he

smokes on and all is for the best. Well may we say, "O tempora! O mores!"

The lady had a gown of light stuff, the fire was rapidly reaching her bodice, and she had not yet perceived that she was burning, when she felt herself suddenly seized by two vigorous arms, which stifled and arrested the flames at the risk of burning themselves. The lady uttered an exclamation, and demanded of the person who was extinguishing her by what right he put his arms around her in that fashion. Adhémar's only answer was to show the lady her dress, of which the whole side was burned.

"Good heavens! monsieur, I understand now. Pardon me. I was burning, then?"

"Yes, madame, your gown had touched a lighted match; fortunately I happened to be near you; and I, who am not apt to see what is going on around me, discovered the flame as it was making rapid progress — and I hastened to help you without thinking of asking your permission; I don't think you will bear me any grudge for that."

"I can only thank you, monsieur. But you have burned yourself!"

"Slightly, on the left hand — it's a very small matter!"

However the idle and curious people, who always come running when the danger is all over, began to gather around the lady and Adhémar.

"What is the matter here?"

"What is it?"

"A lady on fire."

"They must throw water on her."

"She is put out. It is only her gown that's a little scorched."

"She can buy another."

"And the gentleman there — beside her?"

"He must have set her afire with his cigar."

"Then he ought to be arrested — taken to the station."

"Why, no; it was he who extinguished the lady's gown; and he's given himself a nice burn on the left fist."

"Hang it, if he plays the violin that'll put him out."

The hero of the adventure hastened to make his way through the crowd and to enter a chemist's shop, which he fortunately found a few steps off.

The lady seated herself and asked for a glass of orange-flower water to restore her after the shock she had experienced. Adhémar showed his burned hand to the pharmacist, who bathed it first with goulard water and then applied something to it that would promptly cure the hurt. But he would have to have his hand bound and carry his arm in a sling for some time, for the burn was quite large.

While all this was being done, our two personages had time to look at each other, and, as was quite natural, tried to find out with whom they had to do. The person who had so narrowly escaped

being burned was a lady of twenty-five years, tall, slight, and well-built; her face, naturally serious, became agreeable when she smiled; her black eyes were fine and very expressive, two thin but perfectly arched eyebrows surmounted them; her hair was black; her nose, shaped like Niobe's, was rather prominent; altogether the lady was very good-looking, her dress was elegant, and her manners those of a person of quality.

Adhémar had seen all this while they were bandaging his arm, and on her part the lady had examined the person who had done her so eminent a service; as we know, this examination could not be to his disadvantage.

"Really, monsieur, I am exceeding distressed. You have quite a bad burn!" resumed the lady while they were wrapping Adhémar's hand.

"Oh, no, madame, it will be quickly healed."

"Yes," said the chemist, "it will heal quickly, but it is probable that you will always bear the mark of the burn."

"Well, it will be an honorable scar. Remember, madame, that you might have been seriously burned; what is this, beside the danger that threatened you?"

The lady answered nothing, but she looked at her gown and cried,—

"It is impossible for me to go out like this, all the bottom of my dress is burned. Is there no way of getting a carriage?"

"Pardon me, madame," said the chemist, "I will send somebody to get one for you."

"I shall be greatly obliged to you, monsieur."

Adhémar, whose hand was now completely dressed, seemed to hesitate as to what he should do; finally, he bowed to the lady and said,—

"As you have no further need of my services, madame, I will take my leave of you."

The lady colored slightly, but she stopped Adhémar, saying,—

"Monsieur, pardon me for detaining you further, but I should very much like to know the name of the person to whom I am indebted, who has sustained injury on my behalf. Good heavens! perhaps I am indiscreet — if so, pray excuse me."

"There is nothing indiscreet in your request, madame; on the contrary, it is very flattering to me."

As he spoke, Adhémar took from his pocket a card, which he presented to the lady. The latter took it, hastily glanced at it, and an expression of satisfaction gleamed on her features. Then she raised her eyes to Adhémar, and smiled, as she said to him,—

"I know you already by name and reputation, monsieur. I have had the pleasure of seeing the greater part of your plays, and I congratulate myself on now being able to say to the author of them how many agreeable moments I have passed, thanks to his talent."

Adhémar could not master a feeling of pride which was depicted on his face. Where is the author, the poet, the novelist who can be quite impervious to praise, above all when it comes from a witty mouth and is spoken gracefully? From the lips of a fool a compliment produces the same effect as the utterance of the most utter foolishness.

"I am extremely fortunate, madame," said Adhémar, "if my works have interested you; your praises make me almost proud of my success. You are fond of the theatre, madame?"

"Very fond, monsieur."

"Do you go there often?"

"Why, as often as a lonely woman may, for whom it is necessary that she should find a friend disposed to accompany her, for a lady cannot venture alone to the theatre, it is neither amusing nor conventional."

"Ah, you are, madame — you have not— "

"I am a widow, monsieur."

"That is what I was endeavoring to say, madame. Pardon me — for now I am going to be indiscreet, but I shall be very happy to know —"

"For whom you exposed yourself to be burned, and if at least the person was worth the trouble —"

"Oh, madame, pray do not imagine that I meant to say anything of that kind. In the first place, as I take it, any person in danger is worthy of help, whatever his appearance or position. But I cannot but be flattered at having this adventure which

has brought me in contact with you. And, as I see that my question has been indiscreet, I will withdraw it."

"And I, on the contrary, monsieur, think that you ought to know the person you so generously succored; it pleases me to think that you will not regret it."

"To see you, to talk with you is sufficient to give one the most favorable opinion."

"Oh, monsieur, you know one must not trust to appearances. In Paris, of all places, one is very easily deceived. Take it! take it, I beg of you —"

The lady had drawn from a very pretty diary a card which she handed to Adhémar; thus urged, the latter took it, and put it into his pocket, without even glancing at it.

They came to inform the lady that a carriage awaited her. She thanked them, and was about to go, having bowed to Adhémar, but the latter offered his hand to her as he said,—

"Will you not allow me, madame, to see you to your carriage?"

"Very willingly, monsieur."

They left the pharmacy, the lady lightly passing her arm under her escort's, because during the daytime, in the open boulevard, a gentleman who led a lady by the hand would make all the loiterers turn and stop to look at him; it does not take much to attract the attention and arouse the curiosity of the Parisians, who are excessively idle and

snatch every occasion to lose their time. But they had reached the carriage; the lady got in, then she said to Adhémar,—

"Monsieur, will you allow me to take you home, or anywhere else you wish?"

"You are a thousand times too good, madame, but I really cannot give you so much trouble."

The lady bowed low to Adhémar and said to the coachman, "Rue de Paradis-Poissonniére, 40."

The carriage started, and Adhémar watched it as it went off, saying to himself,—

"Ah, let's see what her name is! As to her address I caught that when she gave it to the coachman."

He drew the card from his pocket, and read it,—

"Nathalie Dermont — that is all and there is no 'widow' on the card; and why not? Well, after all, if her husband has been dead for any length of time, there is no reason why she should constantly entitle herself a widow. She's very good-looking, nor does she look stupid, and that, after all, is what one should most be on his guard against, for a stupid woman is dreadfully tiresome. Well, at any rate, I haven't lost my day!"

CHAPTER III

A Dealer in Toilet Articles

Dodichet had for the time being as his mistress — or rather as a companion in pleasure, having no money, except by some occasional stroke of luck, he but rarely permitted himself the luxury of a mistress; well, he had, in fact, as his intimate acquaintance, a young dancer at one of the smaller theatres, who was ever ready to accept from him a dinner or a supper when he was sufficiently flush to invite her.

Dodichet betook himself to the abode of this artist in capers, who was named Boulotte, and lived on a fifth floor in the Faubourg du Temple. Mademoiselle Boulotte, who was in the act of manufacturing some new mineral rouge with some bricks which she was pulverizing into flour, uttered an exclamation of joy when she saw Dodichet and said to him,—

"You came to get me to go to dinner at a restaurant! That's good, that is; for I've had nothing to eat today but a sausage, and that is too light."

"No, Boulotte, no, dear angel of my dreams — when they are golden — I did not come to offer

you a dinner, because the water is low and I should not like to take a woman like you into a low cook-shop."

"Oh, that would be all the same to me. There are some cookshops where they make very fair rabbit stew. But, at any rate, if you have no money I can offer you part of my black radish and some fried potatoes that I am going to buy."

"You are first-rate, you're a jolly good girl; you would share all you possess with a friend. You have nothing very great, to be sure, but there is all the more merit in your offering a part of it. Thank you, my dear, but I cannot accept your little feast, I am looking for an individual. I saw him two days ago, and when he caught sight of me he slunk off like a thief; I could not catch him then, but I shall catch him."

"Is it a man who owes you money?"

"No, he doesn't owe me any, but, all the same, he will have to give me some. Oh, I shall screw something out of him, and without remorse, for he is rich. Then I'll offer you a blow-out with plenty of truffles and champagne."

"And why should this man give you money?"

"Because I am possessed of a secret of his."

"What secret?"

"If I were to tell you, it wouldn't be a secret any longer."

"Do you think me so much of a gossip, then?"

"My little Boulotte, when I possess a secret,

and one that is as good to me as the goose with the golden eggs, I should be very foolish if I were to divulge it. But let's drop the subject; it was not about that that I came here. Boulotte, you must render me a service."

"One, two, three! go on, don't be bashful; for I am quite sure that you will not borrow any money of me."

"What do you take me for? Boulotte, you must know some dealers in toilet articles."

"Yes, I know several of them — but rather seedy ones. Do you want to buy me a shawl?"

"Fie for shame! Do you know a dealer in toilet articles named Madame Putiphar?"

"Madame Putiphar! no, I don't know her. Do you need to make her acquaintance?"

"Yes, and I had counted on you to find her for me."

"Oh, that's easy enough. I shall ask Sara and Clara and Cora, they know so many people, and within two days I'll give you some information about your tradeswoman."

"Very good! To help you in your researches you may say that it is the one who arranges marriages."

"Fine information! they all do that!"

"Really! I believe they undermine them as well. No matter, do my commission; now I'll leave you to your black radish and fried potatoes, but don't eat too much of them — you will see

me again in three days, and if I can get hold of my man it won't be a rabbit stew, but a salmi of partridges stuffed with truffles that I shall offer you."

Dodichet left Mademoiselle Boulotte; but three days later he returned to her domicile and found her again making mineral rouge, for which she shortly hoped to obtain a patent. Dodichet was radiant, he came in polkaing, waltzing, and began by taking the dancer in his arms and waltzing her about, without giving her time to get rid of her brick and her hammer, so that Boulotte screamed,—

"Let me go — let me put down my brick, at least."

"Boulotte, the waltz in the 'Auberge des Adrets,'— you know, the one that Frédérick danced so well in his picturesque costume as Robert Macaire —I've stolen a bit of that waltz."

"Let me put my brick down. That's right! there it is, on the floor now, and broken!"

"Oh, well, as you were going to break it with the hammer, that will save you the trouble."

"It's not the same thing at all; I shall lose half of it on the ground. What has happened to you today to make you so cheerful?"

"Why, by Jove! I've found my man — my Sicilian."

"What the man of the secret!"

"Precisely."

"And is he a Sicilian?"

Dodichet . . . began by taking the dancer in his arms and waltzing.

[illegible]

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ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

"Yes, a Sicilian from Pontoise. Ah, what an unlucky slip! what have I said now? Boulotte, I beg of you don't repeat that word! If you should ever see me with a gentlemen you don't know, don't let the word Pontoise out of your mouth, or all will be ended betwixt us."

"Why, what rigmarole are you telling me now? you look as if you were cracked!"

"Let us drop it. Have you done my commission?"

"Yes, monsieur, I have done your commission. I was quite sure that Rosa, who knows all the dealers in toilet articles in Paris, would know that one — she has lately sold her a steel comb, which she owned through the generosity of an Englishman, of which she had broken two teeth."

"Of the Englishman?"

"No, of the comb."

"All right. Rosa is one of your mates at the theatre, isn't she? a brunette with yellow eyes, and a skin like her eyes."

"Yes, but the question doesn't concern her; you promised me a salmi of partridges if you found your man with the secret. You see, I didn't say 'of Pontoise.'"

"Hush! don't be so imprudent; and in speaking of Rosa, I was just coming to the salmi. Our feast must take place at her house, the day after tomorrow at mid-day, that she may have time to tell Putiphar that she will expect her on that day

towards one o'clock; you understand, I will be there, and I shall have taught you and Rosa what you will have to say to make my plan successful."

"Is it a joke that you are going to play on some one."

"Of course!"

"Well, make your mind easy, we will say all the stupid things you like!"

"I have not the slightest doubt of that. Then it is quite understood,—the day after tomorrow at Rosa's. Is she still in the Rue de Lancry?"

"Still there."

"I promise you a breakfast with swallow's nests, like the Chinese."

"No, I shouldn't like that. The idea of eating bird's nests! how horrid!"

"Then we will transform them into charlotte russes."

"Good enough! You must order the breakfast at Le Comte's, at the corner of the street and the boulevard; he's an excellent caterer."

"Don't you bother yourself, I know the good places!"

Mademoiselle Rosa, Boulotte's companion, lived in a small apartment on a fourth floor in the Rue de Lancry; her home was tastefully furnished; for although she had yellow skin and eyes, she was always kept much better than several of her companions, who, however, were much prettier than she. Why that was I cannot tell you.

Upon the day appointed, at half-past twelve in the middle of the day, Dodichet was sitting at a table between Boulotte and Rosa, in a small dining-room in the latter young lady's apartment. The table was covered with dishes, which they had already ravenously attacked, and with bottles adorned with various labels and containing wine of divers colors. The company was very cheerful, they laughed as they ate, and drank as they laughed.

"Mesdemoiselles," said Dodichet, as he uncorked a bottle of champagne, "I am going to tell you something funny — a joke; in fact the trick I wish to play. You have promised to second me."

"We promise again!"

"I swear by my lover's hair!" said Rosa.

"The devil you do! but it occurs to me that your lover is bald. But no matter; you know what you have to say when Madame Putiphar comes?"

"Oh, we know our parts; you shall have no fault to find with us."

"But she doesn't come, this dealer in toilet articles; suppose she were to play us false?"

"No danger; I told her I wanted a brooch."

"What for — to put in your bonnet?"

"Why, no, to fasten my belt. Wait, someone is ringing; I'll wager it is she."

In fact the maid presently came to say to Rosa,—

"Madame Putiphar is here."

"Well, ask her to come in — she won't prevent us from eating."

Almost immediately a small but enormously stout woman appeared, who must have been between forty and fifty years of age. She had been a striking brunette, but she was more than a brunette now; she was almost black, for her hair, the thick bands of which almost covered her cheeks, was so brilliantly black that at the first glance, and contrasted with her face, which was red and pimpled, her head had the appearance of being varnished. The woman was well-dressed, too well-dressed it would seem, for she had shawls, a big one and a little one on top of it, a collarette showing, and a cravat tied in a shepherd's bow behind, then she had a lot of tinsel on her bonnet; and in addition to this held a flat cardboard box under her arm, which made Dodichet say to himself,—

"This woman must surely carry a portion of her stock-in-trade on her person."

"Good-day, Putiphar!"

"How do you do, Madame Putiphar!"

"Sit you down there, Putiphar; when I wrote to you I did not know that M. Dodichet, a sugar-broker, would offer this morning, to Boulotte and me, this impromptu meal with champagne and truffles. But that's all the same, you are not in a hurry?"

To all this the fat lady responded with a great many bows, accompanied by affectionate glances at the table, as she murmured,—

"Oh, mesdames, don't let me disturb you at all.

It all smells very good here. I am not in the slightest hurry, I shall watch you eating."

"And you will take a glass of champagne with us, madame?"

"Why, you are very obliging, monsieur—"

"Take it, Putiphar, take it! a glass of champagne should never be refused."

"Well, I'll allow myself to go so far as that."

"Have a biscuit with it?"

"I should like better, if it is all the same to you, that thigh of a roast chicken that I see on the dish."

"That's easy enough. Draw your chair up to the table. Manette, a cover for Putiphar. You'll have some pâte de foie gras, too?"

"I'll let myself go so far as that — but, really, I am ashamed; monsieur will think me very gourmandizing."

"That's not a defect, madame, it is a good quality."

Madame Putiphar sat down to the table and stuffed herself with fowl, pâte, truffles, and did full justice to the bordeaux, madeira, champagne, and never paused until they brought in the dessert. Then she wiped her mouth, and said,—

"This is a very delightful little feast, and monsieur knows how to treat the ladies."

"By Jove, mesdames, of what use is money if not to make things agreeable for you?"

"Oh, what a pretty phrase! monsieur, you deserve to be embalmed."

"What do you mean by embalmed?"

"I meant to say moulded into a statuette."

"Unfortunately," said Rosa, "for some time past you've made yourself scarce; one hardly ever sees you now."

"That is not my fault; I am not at my own disposal since my intimate friend, the Count Miflorès came to Paris."

"Oh, that Sicilian — who is so rich."

"He does not know the amount of his own wealth."

"Is he related to you?"

"No, but in Sicily I rendered him an important service; he was about to fall into a volcano — you know there are volcanoes in Sicily."

"Yes, mountains that crackle with fire. I've seen one in a play at the Gaîté."

"My Sicilian, being very curious and very venturesome also, had climbed to the top of Mount Etna and was looking down into the mouth of the crater; suddenly, his cane slipped from his grasp and fell into the gulf of fire. Count Miflorès set great store by this cane, which came to him from his mother, and he was about to descend into the crater to try to recover it, which would have been to court certain death. Fortunately, I was there — with my dog, a magnificent Newfoundland; I showed him the gulf and the cane, of which the end could still be seen, and said, 'Fetch it! fetch it!' My dog understood me, he dashed into the crater,

from whence he presently emerged bearing the cane between his teeth, he laid it at my feet, and I handed it to the delighted count, who vowed to me at that moment a friendship nothing could alter."

"The brave count! no, I meant to say the brave dog! You gave him a famous bone, no doubt, when you reached home?"

"Alas! the poor animal never reached home—in a moment more he fell dead at my feet — he was roasted, the heat of the crater had cooked him."

"Why, that was strange! and although roasted he had been able to bring up the cane?"

"His devotion sustained him. But I think, madame, it is time to attack this almond cake, and moisten it with some Alicante wine."

"Yes, yes, we will attack it and moisten it too; Putiphar, won't you have some almond cake?"

"Why, I will allow myself to go so far as that. As for Alicante wine, I would do anything to get that."

"And what has your Sicilian come to Paris to do?"

"In the first place to see this marvellous city, which the whole world desires to know, and which no one can leave when once he has tasted its pleasures. In the next place this devil of a Miflorès has a mad fancy — he wants to get married."

"You call that a mad fancy, monsieur, why, it is the predominating idea."

"Don't say anything bad about marriage before

Putiphar, Dodichet, she won't forgive you if you do."

"I would forgive everything to monsieur, who knows so well how to feast ladies; only I should like to convert him —"

"By Jove, madame, if I do not care about marriage for myself, I assure you that I have no wish to disgust others with it; and the proof of that is, that I am looking for a wife for my rich Sicilian."

"A wife! — you are looking for a wife, monsieur? Oh, then, pardon me, a little Alicante, if you please — I can manage your business for you."

"My faith! if you can find me some one suitable for my friend you will greatly please me, for I haven't time to do it myself — my head is full of commissions in sugar — I am obliged to neglect my own business, and it bothers me!"

"Monsieur, I must first ask a very important question: Is your count rich?"

"I think you said he did not know the extent of his fortune?"

"Then he will want a rich wife also?"

"Not the least little bit in the world; he cares nothing about money; he has enough of it for two."

"Really! he doesn't require a dowry?"

"A dowry! well if a father were to offer him a dowry he would be capable of giving him a slap in the face; it would offend him."

"What a distinguished man; another little drop of Alicante."

"And some chartreuse?"

"Presently, M. Godichet."

"Dodichet."

"Never mind that. Pray what does your count desire in a young lady?"

"Now you are talking; well, in the first place she must be young —"

"That is of course."

"Well-formed, pretty."

"Those are slight things."

"Then, she must be a real young lady — you understand me?"

"Perfectly! I have all that, monsieur; I have all that, and everybody cannot offer you as much."

"Really, and you assure me that she is all I say?"

"Yes, monsieur, as I am an honest woman. A young person who has been perfectly brought up by the strictest of parents, who never goes out alone —"

"Why, this seems to me almost like a miracle! Oh, there's just one more condition. My Sicilian wishes that she should be a Parisian — he insists on that last clause; he thinks that only a Parisian can wear a crinoline gracefully."

"My young lady is a Parisian, monsieur, born, I think, in the Rue du Pont-aux-Choux, the centre of Paris."

"The centre of the Marais, you mean, Putiphar."

"That doesn't make any difference."

"No; Miflorès doesn't hold to his future wife being born in the Chaussée-d'Antin, all the more that he doesn't know the Chaussée-d'Antin. And the family is honorable? Deuce take it! we insist on that. You can understand that a Sicilian count would not ally himself with a dealer in rabbit-skins."

"Oh, monsieur, the family is very honorable. M. Mirotaine, the papa, is a former tip-staff."

"You are sure of that?"

"Positively, monsieur: he no longer does anything; he lives on his income. Juliette's mother, my young lady is named Juliette, her mother, I say, is dead; M. Mirotaine is remarried to a person much younger than himself; from which you can conclude that the stepmother is in a hurry to marry her stepdaughter."

"Very good! things seem to me to be going swimmingly."

"Monsieur, will you in turn permit me a few questions."

"What's that, Madame Joseph — no I meant to say Putiphar — all the questions you like, with some chartreuse — to drink with these young ladies!"

"Yes, yes; let us drink. Do you like this chartreuse, Putiphar?"

"If it is green, I am afraid it will be too strong."

"This is yellow and that other is green."

"Then I'll allow myself to go so far as to take

some. Oh, M. Godichet can boast of a great many things."

Madame Putiphar tasted the yellow chartreuse, but that did not make her forget the grand affair that she had caught a glimpse of, and she addressed Dodichet,—

"Monsieur, will you first of all tell me the age of your count."

"Thirty-six years; he looks forty, but that is due to the expression he assumes."

"The age is perfect, and the physique."

"The physique is like the age; a fine height and presence, a complexion like a rose, rather a big nose, but he's the better able to blow it."

"My faith! monsieur, all this seems to accord on both sides. Allow me this very day to speak of your rich friend to the Mirotaine family, and as soon as he can let him present himself."

"One minute, dear lady; with Miflorès things can't go quite thus. He's a very eccentric fellow; he is timid, and, what is more, extremely susceptible."

"You want M. Mirotaine to go and seek him out?"

"No, indeed! that would ruin everything!"

"What is to be done then? My faith! I think I'll risk a little green chartreuse, one ought to get used to everything!"

"You are quite right. I drink to the fair sex, of whom you are one, Madame Putiphar."

"I have always hoped so, monsieur. Your health! Hum! it's strong, why it is quite penetrating! Let us see, monsieur, what is necessary to be done in order to put in hand the marriage of your count to my young, innocent Juliette?"

"Listen carefully, and I will inform you. In the first place, Miflorès will never consent to present himself immediately to a family as a suitor; he will want to know, study, examine at his ease, the damsel—and I shall have to be careful not to tell him that she is aware he intends to marry her; what is more, as my friend is very timid, he always wants me to accompany him. I shall find a pretext for going to your Mirotaine's; I shall say that I have business of a commercial nature with the papa, and that I need to go to him to get his answer. Thus my friend will be quite ready to accompany me."

"All that is very easy, monsieur; I shall tell M. Mirotaine that you are very influential with the would-be husband."

"And you won't be lying, I beg you to believe. Oh, one other thing! My friend has the habit of dining in every house he visits; it's a noble habit contracted in Sicily. If they do not give him dinner, he gets the worst opinion of the people where I take him; what is more, he is quite an epicure, and a good dinner, good wines, dainties, all dispose him very favorably."

"Dang it, you're getting more difficult now; for

I must confess to you that M. Mirotaine is a little sparing of expense, rather avaricious, would split a word. He never gives a dinner. When by chance he invites any one, it is on condition that each one brings a dish."

"We shall bring nothing at all, I promise you. Then there is nothing to be done with him there!"

"But it seems to me," said Rosa, "that to find a noble, rich son-in-law, who takes his daughter without a dowry, he might well put himself to a little expense."

"I should think so, indeed," cried Boulotte, "such a match as that is a treasure."

"Yes, my dear belles, you are right. M. Godichet, nothing is ruptured. I will speak to the stepmother; she will second me; she will be delighted to ally herself with a count. She will make her husband hear reason— they will give a repast."

"Good enough!"

"Yes, and, in the mean time, M. Godichet would still like to go to see M. Mirotaine, I suppose?"

"It is altogether needless; I shall go there only on the day that they give us a dinner, and if it were not to oblige my friend I should not go there at all; but one must needs devote one's self to one's friends."

"Mesdames, I must leave you, I must not delay in seeing about this matter."

"Go, Putiphar, go! it will be well worth your while!"

"As soon as I have the day for the dinner settled, I will write to you, M. Godichet."

"Dodichet, once again."

"Pardon me! Dodichet. Oh, your address, if you please!"

"I lodge at the Grand Hotel; but you'll never find me there, it is so big. Send your answer here, to these young ladies, who will give it to me."

"So be it; that is settled. It will perhaps take some days to induce M. Mirotaine to give a dinner, but we shall manage to do so. Good day, M.— Dodichet, I got it right, this time. Oh, if the marriage is brought to a conclusion, as I hope it will be, I ask to be allowed to furnish the basket and all the presents the future husband gives."

"You shall furnish all, Madame Putiphar, even to the bridegroom's braces, if the thing comes off."

"Oh, M. Dodichet, you are an agreeable man."

"Have some more of the green before you go."

"I will let myself go so far as that. Rosa, some other day we will talk about a brooch."

"Yes, Putiphar, there is no hurry about that!"

And the dealer in toilet articles, whose skin had turned violet from the quantity she had imbibed, made a very stately bow to the company.

CHAPTER IV

Two Friends

Juliette, M. Mirotaine's only daughter, was nearly nineteen years of age, but she was so gentle and timid that she might easily have been taken for a schoolgirl of twelve; she trembled before her father, who had always treated her with severity; and since she had had a stepmother her life had been passed in doing the will of the one or other of her parents. Let us hasten to say that Madame Mirotaine, however, was not a tyrant, she was not even unkind at bottom, but she wished to be relieved of her stepdaughter because she herself was coquettish and Juliette was very pretty; for if, on account of her timidity, the latter resembled a child, her physique was quite that of a young and beautiful girl of nineteen; she had a pretty figure, a white skin, brown hair, her mouth was sweet in expression, her teeth even, and her almond-shaped eyes were delightfully soft and gentle. Only, she nearly always kept them lowered, at least before her parents; it pleases me to think, however, that she raised them sometimes when she was talking with Lucien.

Juliette was very sensitive, as one might easily

see by the expression of her eyes and hear from the sound of her voice; she had, therefore, listened at first with pleasure and later with love to Lucien's declarations! for he had been coming for a long time to M. Mirotaine's, whose commissions and errands he was always ready to fulfil, but they had received him with less alacrity since he had dared to ask M. Mirotaine for his daughter's hand. The father had thus answered him,—

"My daughter has no dowry; you have not a sou, no position, no trade, therefore, you cannot marry her. Make money, set up a prosperous establishment, and I will give you my daughter."

"Then, monsieur, promise to keep her for me until I have done so."

"Not at all! that might be altogether too long a period. I shall marry Juliette as soon as I have found a good match; and while awaiting that I should like you still to come here and do my commissions and my errands, when I have need; but only on condition that you never have a private interview with my daughter, and that you do not speak to her again of love."

Lucien had promised; he was obliged to promise, in order to be received at the Mirotaines'; but it may be seen that the situation of the lovers had become very distressing, and it was with great difficulty that they could furtively exchange a word of endearment.

Fortunately for Juliette, she had a bosom friend

to whom she could open her heart, to whom she could tell all her troubles, all her hopes, in fact, all that passed in her heart or her mind.

This was a school friend, who was, however, six years older than Juliette, but who, from her way of seeing things and of feeling and loving, was perfectly in harmony with her younger friend. This friend had been married immediately on leaving school; she had not been able to get them to allow Juliette, who was then only fourteen, to attend her wedding, but Juliette had obtained from her father permission to receive her friend. M. Mirotaine, knowing that the latter was rich, had judged that the acquaintance was desirable.

As one may imagine, when love dawned between Juliette and Lucien, this love was confided to the tender friend, as well as their mortifications, their hopes, and the plans they had formed for the future; the friend had by this time become a widow, but as she had not married for love, it is probable that she wept very few tears on the bosom of her young friend.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon; Juliette was alone in her room and was feeling even sadder than usual, the reason for which we shall learn later. She had at least the privilege of having a room where she could be alone when she pleased; a little passage opening into the antechamber led to it, but for which she would have been obliged to pass through the rest of the apartments. The

young girl therefore could, in a strait, have sometimes received a stolen visit from Lucien; for the latter could have slipped into her room from the dining-room. But Juliette would not allow that; she felt that she would be doing wrong to receive a young man secretly in her room, and she did not wish to expose herself to the remonstrances of her stepmother or to her father's anger. But Juliette was lonely there, sighed there, and sometimes even wept there, for the greater part of the day.

It was therefore with an exclamation of joy, a feeling of happiness, that the poor girl saw the one friend to whom she could divulge the feelings of her heart come into the room.

"Why, here is Nathalie at last!" said Juliette, running to meet the young lady, who began by kissing her. "What a long time it is since you came to see me! for shame! it's very naughty of you, madame, to abandon me thus when you are the only friend I have! the only consolation. Sit down beside me. How pleased I am to see you."

"My dearest Juliette, don't scold me; if I have let some time elapse without coming to see you it is because I have been rather unwell."

"Well, since you were ill there is nothing to be said — but you should have written to me, I would have shown your letter to my father, and he would have let me go to see you — to take care of you."

"It was hardly worth while, you can see for yourself that I am all right now."

"Why, yes; still, you are rather pale."

"I am always pale. But here are you with red eyes; what does that mean? You have been crying—is there anything new? is it because Lucien no longer loves you?"

"Oh, yes, the poor fellow; I can read in his eyes that he will love me for ever—for he can only say it to me with his eyes—but I understand them well!"

"What is the matter, then?"

"Good heavens! it is that they are always wanting to marry me, above all my stepmother, who wants to get rid of me; and this time, it seems, they have found a husband. It's that horrid old toilet dealer, Madame Putiphar, who has brought all that about. She had promised my stepmother to look out for me. This time they assert that it is a fine match—a Neapolitan or Sicilian count—in fact, an Italian nobleman who is enormously rich and requires no dowry—you understand, no dowry. That is what attracts my father!"

"And have you seen this count?"

"No, not yet, thank God; but it seems I soon shall, for they are going to give a dinner to him and one of his friends who accompanies him everywhere."

"Your father is going to give a dinner? impossible!"

"Oh, he would not do it, but it seems this count always dines at the houses he visits—he and his

he did very cleverly although in doing so he burned his hand very badly."

"The poor fellow! I should like to thank him. Was he a workman!"

"No, he was a very distinguished young man, and very good-looking. In the first moment everybody surrounded us, you know how curious people are in Paris. Fortunately there was a chemist's close by, where we took refuge; and there, while they were dressing this gentleman's hand, we had a little talk. You may imagine I was desirous of knowing to whom I was under so great an obligation — I asked the name of my rescuer and he gave me his card! It was M. Adhémar Monbrun, an author who writes charming plays; you do not know of him, for you never go to the theatre — poor little thing."

"No, but I know him by name, through Lucien. This Adhémar Monbrun is a friend of his; he has often spoken to me of him and he says much that is good of him."

"Really! So M. Lucien knows him, and speaks well of him?"

"Yes, he says he is a very obliging man! always ready to serve his friends — sometimes, even, he has said to me, 'If I wanted money, I am quite sure Adhémar would lend it to me; but I think no one should borrow unless he knows how he is going to pay it back.' Well, finish your story."

"It is finished, or nearly so. When this gen-

tleman gave me his card I thought it only proper to give him mine — not wishing he should think he had saved a gay woman — as they now call courtesans. Then I sent for a carriage, for I could not go on foot because of my burned dress; the carriage came, M. Adhémar led me to it, I offered to take him with me, for he was obliged to carry his arm in a sling — that was quite natural, was it not?"

"Most assuredly! the poor young man — he was badly burned then?"

"Yes, on his wrist, it will be nothing, only he will perhaps bear the scar of it. He refused my offer and left me."

"Oh! and is that all?"

"Yes."

"What a pity!"

"You are a child. Oh, yes, there is still something else."

"There now! I was quite sure it wasn't ended."

"I thought it would be impolite of me, knowing the gentleman's address, not to send to learn how his burn was healing — for after all it was for me, in saving me, that he had been injured."

"Why, certainly, it was your duty to send and ask after him."

"However, I hesitated for a long time."

"And why was that?"

"Oh, because — I don't know! I was afraid of seeming to thrust myself on this young man."

"Really! was that the reason?"

"Oh, you are naughty this morning. Well, at last I decided, and three days ago I sent my servant to get news of his burn; she saw the gentleman, who said it was almost healed, that he thanked me greatly for the interest I wished to convey to him, and for which he should have the honor of coming to thank me in person."

"Oh, then he has been to see you?"

"No, that is three days ago and he has not come. Oh, he only said that for politeness' sake — he won't come."

"And I'll wager that he will."

"He can come if he likes; after all, it will make no difference to me."

"What a fib?"

"Juliette!"

"Yes, a fib — it is not all the same to you. Look here, Nathalie, am I not to be in your confidence? You have said to me many times, 'They married me for their own reasons, I have never known what it is to love — it must, however, be very sweet. I am very lonely sometimes, and if I loved, it seems to me I should be no longer lonely.'"

"Yes, I have told you all that — what then?"

"Well, let me look in your eyes — wait! I'll vouch for it you are no longer lonely."

"Why, Juliette, what an idea! do you wish me to love some one whom I scarcely know, who has only spoken to me once — who has no desire to meet me again, as you see."

"Goodness! I didn't say you were in love — but only that I think he pleased you — and that you could have loved him."

"Why, yes, yes, darling; yes, he did please me — yes — I don't know if it is gratitude for the service he rendered me. Wait, I will not hide anything from you again. Since that day I don't know what is the matter with me — I am uneasy, I am sad, everything irritates me, I want to cry, I think of him incessantly; I say to myself that I am foolish, that I have no common sense. But I am no longer lonely — no, no, I am no longer lonely."

And Nathalie kissed her friend tenderly, her heart was solaced, it had needed to vent itself. Then she resumed,—

"And Lucien knows him — oh, how I should like to see Lucien, I should ask him a thousand things; but he has spoken well of him to you?"

"Yes, very well. Oh, now I remember — "

"What do you remember?"

"No, I won't tell you that."

"Something that concerns M. Adhémar? I want you to tell me, on the contrary, and at once!"

"Well, Lucien said to me, 'It's a pity that Adhémar will never place faith in any one he loves — it is true he has been so often deceived by his mistresses that it may have rendered him suspicious; but now he carries it too far, and he has sworn never to love another woman."

Nathalie smiled as she said,—

"Drunkard's vows those, my dear child! and this gentleman is not of an age to keep them."

"And, tell me, dearest, you have nothing new? you have had no news?"

"Of whom?"

"You know very well whom I mean."

"Oh, yes — I understand; but my adventure has caused me to forget the person you speak of. No, thank heaven! I have not seen her again."

"So much the better! for when I think about it, I am always afraid for you."

"You are a child!"

At this moment Madame Mirotaine second entered the room, saying,—

"Juliette, your father is inquiring for you. Your servant, madame; pardon me for interrupting."

"No interruption, madame, I was just about to leave; and I should not like to cause Juliette to disobey her father, either. Good-by, little one!"

And Nathalie kissed her friend, who whispered to her,—

"Come and see me after the famous dinner, and I will tell you all about it."

"And I will tell you if I have seen him again."

"Madame, I have the honor to wish you good-day. My compliments to M. Mirotaine."

"I shall not fail to give them, madame."

CHAPTER V

A Little Served in Large Dishes

The day of the famous dinner arrived, and everything was in confusion at M. Mirotaine's, where the entertainment of strangers was an event quite out of the ordinary course. Since ten o'clock in the morning the master of the house had been walking nervously about his apartments, going every moment from the dining-room to the kitchen, heaving deep sighs as he saw the preparations for the repast; when he saw Goth, his young servant, take something from the sideboard, he would stop and say,—

"What are you taking there?"

"Some pepper, monsieur."

"What are you going to do with pepper?"

"Put it in some sauce piquante that I'm making."

"And of what use is sauce piquante?"

"It is to eat with your roast, your sirloin of beef, monsieur; a fillet would have been tenderer, but you did not wish for that."

"And why not have ortolans at once — eh? You've sworn to ruin me today. Good God, what profusion! what waste! leave that pepper there! it is superfluous."

Madame Mirotaine arrived at this juncture, exclaiming,—

"What is the matter here, my dear?"

"Monsieur, won't let me take the pepper," said Goth; "I must have some, however, for my sauces."

"What are you thinking of, my dear? Do you not wish everything to be good?"

"I wish — I wish you weren't throwing my money out of the window. Every minute this girl is coming to get salt or pepper — it's harrowing."

"Goodness, monsieur, why haven't I a store of all such things in my kitchen, as there is in all good houses? Oh, madame, we must have some gherkins, and some capers for the white sauce for the fish."

"You must go and get some."

"Not at all! they are unnecessary. Of what use are capers? — you have some mustard here."

"Why, monsieur, no one puts mustard in a white sauce."

"Make it brown, then."

"My dear, if you don't let us get what is necessary for the dinner, everything will be spoiled, and then you will have spent money uselessly, instead of doing yourself honor."

M. Mirotaine drew an old colored handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes, muttering,—

"Aldegonde, you are making me do foolish things. In fact, of what is your dinner composed?"

"In the first place we have julienne soup."

"What is julienne soup?"

"It is made of chopped vegetables."

"Ah! chopped vegetables only! What next?"

"On the table there will be butter and radishes."

"That makes two dishes."

"No, those are only relishes, they don't count."

"They don't count! that's pretty! They have to be paid for, however."

"The soup is always followed by a fish —"

"Are you sure the soup must be followed by fish?"

"It is customary. We have a pike — a salmon would have been better — but as the very smallest are worth from fifteen to twenty francs —"

"Monstrous! monstrous! and to think that there are people who eat salmon."

"I have therefore substituted a pike, for which only caper sauce is necessary."

"Why can't we eat it without sauce?"

"It won't be good so. On either side of the fish we shall have cutlets on mashed potatoes and a pie with forcemeat balls."

"One at twenty-four sous, I hope?"

"For eleven people! what are you thinking of? No, it will cost two francs, and that will be scrimped."

"Well — I hope that's the end of it."

"The idea! that's only the first course. We come to the second —"

"Oh, good God!"

"For the roast we have a sirloin; then the vegetables, on one side haricot beans, on the other, spinach."

"Why do you want any more vegetables? You've already given them with your julienne, you told me so; it will be too much to give them here."

"Julienne is a soup, not a dish. Then next—"

"What, is there more to follow?"

"A dish of macaroni and, as is always usual, some sweets."

"Take my head off altogether, why don't you?"

"No, my dear, that would not be nice. We shall have a vanilla cream; you will have to give me some more sugar, I have none left."

"Nor I, either."

"Then there is plenty at the grocer's."

"No, I still have some pieces of sugar candy."

"Give it to Goth. Then dessert, of the fruits of the season."

"Some almonds, raisins, figs and filberts."

"It is summer, and no one gives dried fruits at this season. Then some cheese."

"Marolles cheese — that is the best."

"Fie! for shame! do you want to poison us with your marolles? some roquefort and some biscuits."

"Enough! enough! you are killing me."

"Oh, madame has forgotten the salad."

M. Mirotaine, infuriated by this last suggestion,

applied his foot with some force to Goth's person, and exclaimed,—

"There! take that with your salad — that's to teach you to ask for something else."

Goth began to cry and told them to give her her wages and let her go. Madame Mirotaine managed to calm her and sent her back to her cooking; Aldegonde scolded her husband for allowing himself such very lively remonstrances, and told him she would leave him if he meddled with the domestic details again. M. Mirotaine, who was very fond of his wife, precisely because she led him by the nose, begged her pardon and sighed as he stammered,—

"It's this dinner which irritates me, makes me feel like a brute!"

"Remember, you are going to be rid of your daughter — to marry her to an Italian count, who is also a millionnaire, the Count de Miflorès! — who will make us a superb present, I feel quite sure, when he sends us the wedding basket."

"Do you think he will make us a present?"

"Madame Putiphar is sure of it."

"So be it!"

"All that is quite worth a dinner. Oh, monsieur, have you thought of the wine?"

"Of the wine? Why, I have some in the cellar."

"Yes, our ordinary wine, which is exceedingly bad!"

"The more water one puts in it, the better it is."

"But bordeaux is necessary for the second course, and champagne for the dessert — it is customary."

"Out upon your custom! fortunately I know a manufacturer of champagne that costs only one franc or twenty-five sous a bottle."

"That must be detestable."

"He swears it's delicious, and that it foams like beer."

"As for bordeaux, you have received a basket of twenty-five bottles, either in payment or as a present, but I know it is excellent."

"Yes, but I am keeping it for when I am sick."

"You must give me two bottles, monsieur; I must have them."

"Two bottles! isn't one enough?"

"No, we are eleven at table."

"So many as that?"

"When people entertain strangers, they don't give them only a family dinner, that is too unceremonious. I have invited all the Brid'oisons; we have several times dined with them, and this was a very good opportunity for returning their hospitality; besides, you have done much business with M. Brid'oison —"

"Oh — sometimes he sends me borrowers. Are they bringing their son?"

"That is a matter of course, you know very well how foolish they are about him. We shall

naturally have Madame Putiphar; it is she who is making the marriage, and then she knows an intimate friend of the count, a very jolly young man, or so it seems. Then I have invited your sister, Madame Trichon — she is a very good woman."

"Yes, she is a widow without children, with money which I shall inherit should she die. But she's very greedy — she eats a good deal."

"As a set-off to that I've invited M. Callé; he's a very distinguished young man and he eats almost nothing."

"Do you believe he eats almost nothing? but, by the way, why was this gentleman invited to dinner?"

Aldegonde bit her lips for a moment trying to think of an answer. At last she found one,—

"This young man is a very good musician. He sings very well — he plays the flute. In the evening, if it is agreeable, we can have a little music."

"Do you mean to tell me this gentleman can sing and accompany himself on the flute?"

"No, but he can play for us to dance, for I have invited several other persons for the evening — and if we wish to dance —"

"Whom have you invited, then?"

"The ladies Boudard, your friend M. Dubotté and his wife."

"Oh, they'll never come here — they won't."

"He has said that he hopes to come on this

occasion. Then, the brothers Bridoux. Oh, we shall be a good many people. Only we shall have to hand about refreshments during the evening."

"Well, you can give them some liquorice water."

"No, monsieur, no! liquorice water will pass when we have only your sister and M. Callé, who is very sober, but for strangers, for the Italian count, we must have something besides liquorice water."

"Well, some lemonade then. Cut a lemon into two or three quarts of water — it is very refreshing."

"That is my business, monsieur — I shall have to warn you — I know exactly what it is necessary to offer. You will dress yourself decently, I hope."

"Am I not all right as I am?"

"No, certainly not, you have soiled linen and a waistcoat covered with spots — you must wear a black coat."

"I haven't a dress coat."

"You haven't a coat?"

"Why should I have, since I never wear one? but I have a black frock coat, which is only five years old, and is as good as new."

"Well, monsieur, be careful about your dress, I have advised your daughter also to make herself look as nice as she can; she must try to please this M. Miflorès!"

"Oh, the young girls are always coquettish enough."

"As for myself, I shall try to be presentable and do you credit. I'm going to take a peep at the cooking."

Left alone, M. Mirotaine heaved a deep sigh, then after reflecting for some time, he went quickly down into the cellar carrying a pitcher of water; there he took several bottles of wine, then, choosing some empty bottles, he filled them two-thirds with wine and filled them up with the water from his pitcher. Having thus baptized four bottles, he went up with them, delighted at what he had done. Later he took two bottles of bordeaux Léoville, of which some one had made him a present, and prepared to attenuate them in the same way, but he heard a noise; it was Aldegonde, who had come in search of him; she snatched the two bottles of bordeaux that she saw on the table, and the generous wine escaped the baptism that had awaited it.

While M. Mirotaine was deciding to change his clothes, and madame was carefully adorning herself, Juliette, who had been dressed for a long time, and would almost have liked to make herself look ugly so as not to please this gentleman who wanted to marry her, but who, however, was still pretty, because when a woman wishes to make herself look ugly somehow she manages so as not to do so; Juliette was engaged in laying the table, for the cook was too busy with her saucepans to have time to attend to that matter. The young girl sighed as she placed the plates, and said to herself,—

"If this was the feast for the occasion of my betrothal to Lucien, how different it would seem to me! How happy I should be! but they haven't even invited him to dinner. Poor Lucien! but yesterday my father made him trot to the Barrière du Trone at Passy and never even gave him a three sous fare for a seat on the top of an omnibus."

Madame Mirotaine came to see that the table was laid as it should be; she held in her hand squares of paper, on which were the names of the guests.

"It's a question of placing them intelligently," said Aldegonde.

"What do you want done with those squares of paper, madame?"

"They are to indicate to each person the place he is to occupy at table."

"Can they not sit where they like?"

"No, good form is to put the name of the guest beforehand on his plate; it's more convenient to seat them thus."

"Then I beg of you, madame, don't place me beside that Italian count."

"Why, on the contrary, Juliette, you must be beside him. Since he is coming here with the intention of making your acquaintance, he must be able to talk with you."

"You know very well I don't talk, madame; put him beside you, he will like it much better."

"Why, Juliette, it is not me this gentleman wishes to marry."

"It is a pity that it isn't."

"What a child you are! All I can do is to put the count between the two of us — let's see, that will be on my left; on my right I must put the sugar-broker, whom Madame Putiphar asserts to be very amiable. After him whom shall I put? It's very bothersome — it is a science to place one's guests well."

"Put M. Brid'oison."

"No — there must be a lady beside each man, one must mix the sexes as much as possible. Oh, Madame Putiphar, this gentleman knows her, he will be pleased to talk with her. Then — goodness, how tiresome it is, ah! M. Callé, that's it, M. Callé, then Madame Brid'oison — M. Mirotaine — Madame Trichon and M. Brid'oison — there! that's done with!"

"But that only makes ten, and we have eleven covers. You have forgotten to write one."

"Pshaw! whom have I forgotten?"

"Artaban — little Brid'oison."

"Yes, that's true — he's not a very pleasant neighbor, that little boy — his father makes him do his gymnastics, and he's always gesticulating to show his suppleness and his strength; he kicks you at every turn."

"Put him beside me, I shan't mind him."

"No, we must put him between his father and Madame Trichon, the latter will make him behave himself and keep still. This time people are well

distributed. I'll run and finish dressing, for it is already after four — and you, Juliette."

"I am ready, madame — "

"But your hair isn't done nicely at all, and nothing in it — not even a flower!"

"What good would that be?"

"What do you mean? What good! when it's a question of marrying you — and to a millionnaire count!"

"You know well that Lucien is the one I love."

"Well, good heavens! love your Lucien as much as you please, but marry the count — that is all that we ask of you."

Aldegonde returned to finish her adornment, Juliette went back to her room, blessing the dealer in toilet articles; and M. Mirotaine, who had completed his toilet, then came into the dining-room and walked around the table, carefully examining all that was on it.

"What a table, what a meal! what ceremony — three glasses to each guest! Do they want to drink three times running? Ah, there are champagne glasses for the champagne — how lucky it was that I found some at twenty-five sous. What's all this? radishes, butter, gherkins, pickled onions — what profusion!"

Approaching the shell dish which contained the gherkins, M. Mirotaine began to count them.

"Nine — ten — twelve gherkins, and they are very large — there are too many. And he took four

of the gherkins from the dish and put them in his pocket, saying, "There'll be quite enough. Let's look at the pickled onions, there are too many of them, also!"

He took a fistful of the onions out of the vinegar and thrust them also into the pockets of his coat; then it was the radishes' turn. From them, as there were a good many in the dish, he took two fistfuls, which went to join the onions and the gherkins. It only remained for him to visit the butter, he had paused before it asking himself if he could put it aside somewhere, but at that moment the bell rang and M. Mirotaine had only just time to lick the finger with which he had touched the butter.

It was the Brid'oison family who arrived first. M. Brid'oison, a big, dry man, with a foxy face, a little softened by the frequent use of the juice of the grape, and with a tone that was still doctoral when he was not under its influence. Madame, a big yellow woman, almost as thin as her husband, a face like a hatchet, blear eyes, and big corkscrew ringlets which floated on to her shoulders; then there was their son Artaban, who was eight years old, with curly hair, a flat nose, a long, pointed chin, an impudent expression, hands which were never clean and who could walk on his head with his legs in the air, to the pride and delight of his father.

"Here we are!" said M. Brid'oison; "We came early, but I don't like to keep any one waiting;

there are people who say it is good form to be late, but I think it's very bad form. Good-day, Mirotaine, and where are the ladies?"

"Still dressing, probably, are women ever finished when it's a matter of attiring themselves?"

"Oh, I am very quickly ready," said Madame Brid'oison; "five minutes suffices me."

"Yes, I put my wife on a good footing, I said to her, 'Égilde, when you are not dressed in five minutes, I warn you I shan't wait for you, I shall start without you.' Oh, I am very strict as to promptitude."

"At first that made me very unhappy, and one day—we were going to dine in town—Brid'oison shouted to me 'Time's up!' and I hadn't put on my garters, so I started without them; but it embarrassed me all along the road."

"Here is my son Artaban, who's a perfect Ariel at gymnastics already. Artaban, walk on your head—to show how well you can do it!"

The little boy immediately precipitated himself on to his hands, with his head down and his feet in the air, and thus made the tour of the drawing-room; but in replacing his feet on the floor he knocked against the pedestal of a small table on which they had placed, beforehand, the cups for the coffee; the shock threw two of them on to the carpet, where they broke. M. Mirotaine uttered loud exclamations.

"Devil take you and your gymnastics! Here

are cups broken now. What an idea is this, to make a child walk on his head, and in a drawing-room, too."

"By Jove! don't get so angry about two cups, and here's one of them only has the handle broken."

"It is of no further use, however."

"Well, I'll give you two others."

"Yes, people always say that, but they never do replace anything. Are you going to put your son in the circus that you make him do feats of strength?"

"No, I shall make an advocate of him."

"And do you imagine that he will plead walking on his hands?"

"My dear fellow, gymnastics are good in everything, in all positions. An advocate might have to demonstrate how a thief undertook to introduce himself into a window — he would come out of it ill if he did not understand gymnastics."

The ladies came into the drawing-room accompanied by Madame Trichon.

"What was the matter?" said Aldegonde, "I heard my husband shouting."

"Nothing, fair lady, a mere trifle."

"His son breaks two pretty cups in walking on his head and he calls that nothing."

"Does your son walk on his head? oh, I should have liked to see that!"

"He can do it again!"

"No, no! I don't want him to begin again, that he may finish up the tea service."

"Well, something else—to show you how strong the little one is already. Artaban, lift up a chair with your arm extended. That won't endanger the cups, Mirotaine. Come Artaban, choose a chair."

The little boy took one of the drawing-room chairs, did not positively lift it with extended arm, but held it in the air for some time, then suddenly feeling tired, instead of replacing the chair on the ground, he sent it tumbling over his shoulder, and the rungs struck Madam Trichon in the face, that lady being behind M. Artaban.

"Oh, I'm wounded, my nose is taken off!" cried the lady, putting her hand to her face.

"Madame, that is nothing," said M. Brid'oison, "your nose is still in it's place—a simple graze, that is all."

"Water!—cold water—I beg of you—that I may bathe my face!"

"Very nice indeed, your son's gymnastics—I compliment you on them," said M. Mirotaine; "I only hope he won't show us any more of them."

"That was because you bothered him. But for that he would have put his chair down in front of him. But all the same he will be a fine strong fellow. I am very pleased I gave him the name of Artaban—he will have reason to be proud of it."

Then came Madame Putiphar, then M. Callé. The latter was a young man of twenty-five, who

resembled one of those wax figures which hair-dressers put in their windows; his hair was combed like a lemonade boy's, his chestnut locks divided by a parting which came from the back of his neck; he looked extremely stupid, and his language was in accord with the expression of his face; he always looked astonished, always came sidewise into a room, and never knew what to do with his hat.

This young man cast sheep's eyes at Aldegonde and turned scarlet on shaking hands with M. Mirotaine. Madame hastened to put the gentleman at his ease by disembarrassing him of his hat. M. Callé bowed even to little Artaban, who responded to this courtesy by straddling his legs as far apart as he possibly could. As to Madame Putiphar, she was very much at her ease at the Mirotaines' and, after dropping a curtsey, said hastily,—

"They're not come yet, then?"

"No, not yet."

"Oh, it is only half-past five and I told them you didn't dine till six — they won't be late."

"You're expecting some one else, then?" asked M. Brid'oison of the master of the house.

"Yes, two gentlemen — whom I do not know."

"What! you are giving a dinner to people you don't know?"

"It is for a matter — a family affair."

"Besides, I know these gentlemen," resumed Madame Putiphar, "and I will answer for them. First, there is M. Dodichet, a sugar-broker, a young

man of the highest breeding; then comes his intimate friend, the Count of Miflorès, an Italian as rich as an English lord, who is looking for a young lady to marry, and who does not want a dowry."

The toilet merchant added in a whisper and taking care to move farther away from Juliette, "We must not seem to be aware of the count's intentions, for that will displease him. He thinks we are ignorant of them, and that we've only invited him because he is M. Dodichet's friend. In this way, you see, he can talk to Juliette without embarrassment."

"Very well — but all the same, you did well to warn us. I should like a little absinthe, it gives one an appetite," said Brid'oison.

"My dear fellow, if you want absinthe, there's a café at the corner of the street, go and get some."

"What, haven't you any here?"

"Fie for shame! absinthe — why it's poison."

"Yes, if you drink it neat; but with water — "

M. Mirotaine tapped angrily with his foot and exclaimed,—

"Pest take Brid'oison with his absinthe. The idea of his asking for it. M. Callé, do you drink it?"

"Why the idea! I've never tasted it in my life."

"Good enough! that proves that you've a good stomach and need nothing to aid your digestion."

CHAPTER VI

A Miscellaneous Dinner Party

At five minutes to six the bell rang loudly.

"Here are the gentlemen," said the dealer in toilet articles.

Immediately each one sought to assume a dignity befitting the circumstances. Aldegonde assumed her most charming and amiable expression, M. Mirotaine did the best he could towards smiling, Madame Trichon used her handkerchief, the others looked curious; Juliette alone did not make the slightest grimace. She was sad; she hoped they would not come

Goth announced: "M. de Comte Mimiflorès and M. Beaubrochet." Maids nearly always have a talent for mispronouncing the names that are given them. Dodichet came in as cavalierly as if he were entering an inn; he held by the hand his intimate friend. The latter was a gentleman of thirty-six, of medium height, fat rather than thin, who tried to hide his nullity and stupidity under an imposing manner; he had a meaningless face, but he tried to put so much expression into his eyes that they were almost haggard. His dress was irreproachable and even fastidious, but he wore his clothes very badly, and

carried himself in such a fashion as to make one believe that he was embarrassed in his surroundings.

Dodichet bowed on all sides, almost laughing. He took M. Mirotaine's hand and shook it warmly before the latter had had time to return his bow, and exclaimed,—

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, M. Mirotaine, I have long desired to do so; an occasion presented itself at last, and I seized it. We shall do some business together, M. Miroton, pardon me, Mirotaine — I'm as bad as the maids at names."

"Monsieur — you are assuredly — "

"Allow me to present my intimate friend, the Count Miflorès, a rich Italian, who can command me whenever it is necessary," and Dodichet added in a whisper, "You know, he wants to marry — and he's not looking for any dowry."

"Yes, monsieur, so they told me."

"Hush! enough said! we mustn't look as though we were talking of it. Come, Miflorès, let me present you to these ladies — you are timid, but you mustn't let that hinder you from rendering to the fair sex all the homage that is their due."

Dodichet's assurance, his gabble, and the specious phrases he uttered had their customary effect on people who had little or no wit; everybody thought him charming, especially Juliette, to whom he had whispered, as he presented Miflorès to her,—

"Don't be uneasy, he won't marry you. I'm one of Lucien's friends."

A joyful exclamation escaped the young girl.

"What is the matter?" demanded Aldegonde.

"Nothing," said Dodichet, "my foot accidentally came against mademoiselle's. I haven't hurt you, I hope?"

"No, monsieur, you have done me no harm."

"Then all is for the best, as Voltaire says in 'Candide'—Is it in 'Candide?' by Jove, I'm not sure; I have read so many things during my life that I get them all mixed up, I confuse the authors. Lately some one asked me who wrote the 'Mariage de Figaro' and I answered, 'M. d'Ennery'—I was mistaken."

"Here's my friend Brid'oison, who bears the same name as one of the personages in that play," said M. Mirotaine.

"Ah, monsieur is called Brid'oison, a fine name, a pretty name, recalling a very witty character."

"I try to be worthy of my name," said that gentleman, with dignity.

"You are quite capable of it, monsieur. Do you stammer, monsieur?"

"No, really, I can't say I do."

"That is a pity, but it may come later."

"And here is my son Artaban, who is already very strong at gymnastics."

"Oh, yes! well, that doesn't astonish me, this little boy's figure has something of Hercules."

"You think so?" and M. Brid'oison, delighted, patted his son's cheek, and said,—

"Do you understand? you have something of Hercules?"

"What, papa?"

"I don't know — but you have something."

The pretended suitor held himself very stiffly in the middle of the room, not knowing what expression to put on, but scratching his nose often, so as to do something. He had not yet said a word and contented himself with bowing.

"M. le Count says nothing," murmured Madame Putiphar, approaching Dodichet. "Why doesn't he open his mouth?"

"Be easy about that, he'll open it at dinner."

"He looks proud."

"That'll all pass off at dinner."

"Ask him what he thinks of Juliette."

"He thinks she's charming; he told me so as we came in."

"How did he know it was she?"

"That's good, mischief! is there any other young girl here? All the other women are veterans — I mean to say, they've made their market."

Goth came to announce that dinner was served, and M. Miflorès then exclaimed,—

"So much the better!"

"It seems this gentlemen is hungry," said M. Mirotaine, dryly.

"I am quite of his opinion," said M. Brid'oison.

Dodichet urged his friend to go and offer his arm to the mistress of the house, and gave his own

to Juliette; on the way to the dining-room he managed to slip a few words into her ear that gave an expression of good-humor to her face.

They placed themselves, Madame Trichon grumbled and pouted on seeing that they had seated her by little Artaban. M. Brid'oison, vexed that any one should fear to be near his son, wished to change his place. But Aldegonde opposed this; Madame Trichon was appeased. Then came the soup, but as she served it, Aldegonde looked at the relishes placed on the table and questioned her maid.

"Goth, did you not put all the gherkins and pickled onions I gave you into the dishes?"

"Why, yes, madame, I put them all."

"There were a good many more than that, I thought. It is singular."

"Do you think I ate them, madame? You know I never touch anything — all the more because everything is locked up here."

"That's enough! that's enough!"

"This soup is delicious," cried young Callé, who had been given his part and knew that he must find everything excellent.

"And my radishes, too," muttered Aldegonde, "oh, my servant must have taken them."

"We must all live," said Dodichet, "and I ask you for something to drink."

When he had drunk, Dodichet made a slight grimace.

"Excellent burgundy!" cried Callé.

"But terribly weak," answered Dodichet. "But perhaps it's a bottle that was ill-corked."

M. Miflorès ate, drank, and still said nothing. However, Juliette, whom Dodichet's confidences had deprived of all fear, sometimes spoke to this gentleman in offering him something that was being served; and the pretended count bowed and accepted what was presented to him, but he did not speak.

"Your friend is very silent," said Aldegonde to Dodichet; "he hasn't said a word to my stepdaughter, although the latter has shown herself very amiable to him, which surprises me a good deal, I must confess to you."

"I really think he will speak at dessert." Dodichet leaned over and poked his friend in the back, saying to him,—

"Well, Miflorès, you say nothing to your neighbors — they are astonished at your silence."

"I do not like to talk while I am eating," answered that gentlemen, who, in fact, had his mouth full.

"What exquisite fish!" cried Callé, who had been served with pike.

"It is a pity it has so many small bones," said Dodichet.

Madame Brid'oison began at that moment to cough as though she was strangling.

"Come, there's my wife has swallowed a fish bone," said Brid'oison.

But Égilde made a sign that it was not that which had made her cough but only one of her ringlets that had got into her mouth.

"Then, I shall say no more about it. What a mania women have for wearing their hair long."

M. Mirotaine passed his time in offering water to every one. M. Callé was the only one of the men who accepted it,— and the host looked at him in a very friendly manner. Young Artaban, who up to this had kept quiet enough, now began to toss his knife and fork in the air, to the great displeasure of Madame Trichon, who said to him,—

"Little one, you should not conduct yourself thus in company; you should keep still at the table, and not play with the knives and forks."

M. Brid'oison, who admired his son's skill, answered,—

"Madame, Artaban is not playing, he is now juggling like the Indians — they call that juggling. The Indians have balls which they toss in the air with great dexterity; in default of balls, Artaban uses his knife and fork — it is more difficult and dangerous, but don't be afraid, Artaban is too adroit to hurt himself."

"No, but he will hurt me; he'll send his fork into my face, and I have had quite enough of that with the chair."

"Madame, I will answer for my son. He's as active as a monkey."

M. Brid'oison had hardly finished these words,

when a fork launched by Artaban struck Madame Trichon's chin right over her teeth. The lady uttered a loud cry, and rose angrily, saying,—

"It's frightful, it's shameful! He's bound to disfigure me. Let them put me at a little table, but I will stay no longer by this little scamp."

M. Brid'oison became scarlet on hearing his son called a scamp; he mumbled several words between his teeth, which happily were covered by the crash of several plates which the maid dropped at that moment, to M. Mirotaine's despair. However, at a sign from Aldegonde, M. Callé rose, gave his place to Madame Trichon and took hers. Then quiet was restored, although M. Brid'oison muttered again,—

"Scamp! to call my son Artaban a scamp! if that lady was a man she would have to give me satisfaction for that."

The two bottles of bordeaux were brought in, and Dodichet uttered an exclamation of joy when he had tasted it.

"Good enough! that's what you may call wine and it is delicious; an intoxicating bouquet!"

"Will you have some water?" said M. Mirotaine, offering the water bottle.

"Water with such wine as that! Why, it would be profanation! I should hope no one will be ill-advised enough to spoil that wine with water. Miflorès, my dear count, taste this wine—that will make you eloquent."

"If that, or anything else, renders the gentleman eloquent I shall be much astonished," whispered M. Brid'oison to Callé, who was ogling Aldegonde, who was watching Miflorès, who was admiring his full glass.

"How they are eating! how they are drinking!" said M. Mirotaine to himself, stifling a sigh; "but I don't see that this asserted suitor seeks to make my daughter's acquaintance; on the other hand, this sugar-broker is quite chatty—he seems to me rather a humbug. Good God, if I should be let in for my dinner."

Dodichet offered bordeaux, but he was always careful to help himself first. M. Miflorès managed to say,—

"Yes, this is really good wine."

Callé went further than any of them and said,—

"This wine is nectar!"

The two bottles were soon empty.

"Monsieur Mirotaine, give us some more of it," said Dodichet; "you see how we appreciate it."

"I have no more of it," answered M. Mirotaine; "those were my last two bottles."

"Oh, what ill-luck!"

"But you will have some champagne."

"If it's as good as the bordeaux, it will be ambrosia."

The champagne came at the same time as a cream, which Goth placed on the table proudly.

"Hurrah for sweet dishes!" said Dodichet.

"It is a vanilla cream," said Aldegonde; and Miflorès uttered a second exclamation,—

"So much the better!"

"He has spoken," said Madame Putiphar.

"Yes, but not to Juliette."

"That will no doubt come with the champagne."

Aldegonde served some cream to everyone and each one hastened to take a mouthful, but almost immediately exclamations came from every side,—

"Why, what is the matter with this?"

"What a singular taste."

"By Jove, that's horrid!"

"In the first place it isn't sweet at all!"

"If it were only that—but this taste—this odor. I know the taste, but I can't remember what it is."

Aldegonde called her cook, who came immediately.

"Goth, what have you put in your cream? it has the most extraordinary flavor!"

"Madame, I made it as it is always made, I put some milk, yolks of eggs, a little vanilla, for I had hardly any to put."

"And some sugar—"

"Yes, the sugar candy that monsieur gave me, which was wrapped up in paper; I put every bit of it."

"Oh, I know what it smells of now," exclaimed Dodichet; "it is camphor—your cream is camphorated."

"What does this mean, M. Mirotaine?" said Aldegonde, looking severely at her husband; "did you give Goth camphor instead of sugar?"

"Then I must have mistaken the package," said Mirotaine, a little confused; "I had, it is true, a few lumps of camphor in my desk — why, I must have got it mixed with the sugar."

"There is no further doubt, monsieur; it was camphor you gave the maid."

"Fortunately we know that it is innocuous," said Dodichet. "Come, open the champagne, that will make us forget the camphor."

Each guest hastened to tender his champagne glass; the champagne foamed, but not long, and when everyone had drunk there was a deep silence; a very disagreable silence under such circumstances, and which, as at the theatre, was equivalent to hissing. At length, Dodichet, who was always frank in his speech, exclaimed,—

"Confound it! this champagne is not nearly so good as your bordeaux! M. Mirotaine, the one who sold it to you has let you in!"

"What! let me in! It's cliquot, it's creaming."

"That creaming — as much as I'm dancing. I demand the address of the one who furnished it to you — that I may not buy any of him."

The champagne having proved a complete failure, and Aldégonde having no other wine to offer, the dessert was nipped in the bud, and they presently adjourned to the drawing-room and coffee.

The guests had none of that conviviality which almost always accompanies the rising from table; it is true that they had had nothing to go to their heads; the vin-ordinaire was attenuated, the champagne was like vinegar and undrinkable; the bordeaux alone was successful, but two bottles is very little for eleven persons, above all when one of them monopolizes half of it for his own share.

Madame Trichon was still angry at having received a fork in her chin and a chair on her head. M. Brid'oison was sulky because she had called his son a scamp; his wife was still swallowing her hair; Madame Putiphar and Aldegonde were uneasy at the silence which the Italian count maintained towards Juliette; the latter alone was in a delightful humor and was very well seconded by Dodichet, who sometimes hid his face to laugh as he looked at Miflorès.

The coffee was brought, Aldegonde was filling their cups, when M. Brid'oison offered his snuff-box to M. Mirotaine, saying,—

"Try that, and tell me how you like it."

"Why, you know very well I don't use it."

"This snuff deserves that you should derogate from your custom."

M. Mirotaine took a pinch of snuff and thrust it into his nose, making a sign of approbation. But presently the odorous powder produced its customary effect on one who was not in the habit of using it; two successive sneezes escaped M. Mirotaine,

and the second was so grave in its effects that that gentleman quickly took out his handkerchief to blow his nose. As he pulled it precipitately from his pocket, he brought with it a shower of gherkins, radishes and small pickled onions.

Everyone was stupefied and looked with astonishment at the relishes which covered the carpet and furniture. Madame Trichon alone uttered a doleful exclamation; that lady, who was indeed unlucky, had been hit in the eye with a pickled onion, and the vinegar from it made the delicate organ in which it had lodged smart sharply.

"What, monsieur, you put a part of the relishes in your pocket?" said Aldegonde. "And I suspected poor Goth! For shame, monsieur, for shame —it is unpardonable!"

Instead of begging his wife's pardon, M. Mirotaine went down on all fours to pick up the vegetables he had involuntarily released from his coat pocket. As to Madame Trichon, she went to cry in a corner, saying that they had resolved to disfigure her.

While taking his coffee, Dodichet said to his friend,—

"Look here, Miflorès, talk a bit; try to do the amiable with these ladies. You look like an oyster, my dear fellow."

"I did not ask you to come here, but you insisted on my accompanying you, saying that would inspire the master of the house with confidence

toward you and that you hoped to do very big business with him."

"That's true, that's very correct—and that was why I wanted you to pass for an Italian count."

"Oh, that's all the same to me."

"A lie more or less, what does it matter? and you lie already when you call yourself Miflorès; your name is Seringat; a pretty name, for that matter, which reminds one of a canary,[1] a flower,[2] and a syringe.[3] Miflorès is not your name."

"It was my mother's name and I can use it."

"In fact, you don't want any one to know your real name or what has happened to you, isn't that it?"

"Oh, no—never! it is rather—I don't know why."

"As for me, I knew all along what was your motive—"

"Yes, but you promised to keep my secret, my dear fellow!"

"Yes, but on condition that you would make yourself pleasant—that you would render me all the services I asked of you."

"That is understood. Do you need any money; you have only to speak."

"Not now—but try to be amiable here, cheerful, gallant—that's all I ask of you."

"I'll try immediately."

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[1] Serin: French for canary, and slang for simpleton, muff, etc. [2] Seringa: syringa. [3] Seringue: a squirt or syringe.

And this gentleman at once approached the mistress of the house, took her hand, and kissed it several times.

"What does this mean? does he expect to marry my wife?" said M. Mirotaine to himself.

But Aldegonde did not find this pantomime disagreeable; she smiled at Miflorès; she believed that he was going to ask her for her stepdaughter's hand; the gentleman, however, only bowed and remarked,—

"Here's another gherkin under the sofa."

M. Callé hastened to go and pick up the gherkin and take it to M. Mirotaine, who put it back in his pocket and said to Callé,—

"Nothing escapes you, you'll make your way."

Dodichet tried to inspire the company with a little geniality and cheerfulness, and to that end he frequently had recourse to the brandy, the only liqueur which they had to offer to the guests; he helped himself to some small glasses and did not even offer it to any one else. M. Mirotaine saw this with vexation, and muttered,—

"This gentleman abuses my brandy; this is the third time he's been to it — he drinks as though he were in his own house. Such manners are very low. I'll try to get the decanter away without my wife seeing me."

The arrival of several persons invited for the evening permitted M. Mirotaine to put his plan into execution.

Goth announced "Mesdames Boulard" and three ladies came in, very middle-aged, dressed very fashionably, with little turban hats that hardly covered the tops of their heads, which were adorned with chignons as big as muffs. Their crinolines were of such a size that their bodies looked as though they were placed on balloons, and the door of the drawing-room was hardly wide enough to admit them.

At sight of this trio, who took up so much room, Dodichet said to Brid'oison,—

"Your little Artaban should do some gymnastics on these balloons and flatten them a bit."

"You are right, the women are becoming ridiculous — soon one of them will fill a drawing-room. Look at my wife, what a difference, I have forbidden her to wear crinoline; so she can go anywhere. She's a regular knitting-needle."

Following the ladies Boulard came the brothers Bridoux; these latter had not the slightest pretension to taking up much space. They came in, using their handkerchiefs and bowing as they still held their noses, and, when they decided to release the latter, showing stupid insignificant faces such as one sees everywhere and which do not tempt people to converse with their owners.

One of the brothers Bridoux went to hide behind one of the Boulard ladies' balloons. The second exclaimed,—

"How's this? Where's that dear Mirotaine?"

Mirotaine, dear fellow, had gone to place the brandy in safe keeping. But Madame Putiphar took Dodichet aside and said to him,—

"Well, monsieur, and how is our little affair going. What does the count think of our Juliette? He hasn't breathed a single word to her. What does that mean? does she not please him? We must know where we stand, however —"

"Reassure yourself, my lady of the toilet, my friend is delighted, charmed with the young person; he finds her altogether to his taste and full of wit."

"How can he judge of her wit? he has not spoken to her!"

"No, but he has heard her speak, which comes to the same thing. Besides, several times she passed a plate to him saying, 'Will you have some of this, monsieur?' And the manner in which she said these simple words gave him some idea of her worth."

"Well, then, when is your count coming to ask for her?"

"Tomorrow, probably; you must comprehend perfectly that he can't do it tonight before everybody."

"Then I can explain that to M. Mirotaine, and begin to think about the basket."

"That is to say, you must begin to think about it as soon as possible, and make us a bride's basket worthy of a sultan."

The tradeswoman went off delighted, and was

about to go and repeat this conversation to Aldegonde, when M. Dubotté and his spouse were announced.

Madame Eléonore Dubotté was a little woman of twenty-five, fair-haired, white-skinned, plump, with a round, very fresh face, and very soft blue eyes which she kept almost constantly on her husband: you will remember the latter had complained that his wife was too fond of him.

Dubotté went to pay his compliments to Aldegonde; but he had some trouble in making his wife let go of his arm. Then he went to shake hands with Mirotaine, who reappeared without his decanter and showed that he was highly flattered that Dubotté should have accepted his invitation. But on seeing Dubotté come in Dodichet assumed a singular expression of countenance, and muttered,—

"Devil take it! here is a meeting I had not expected — it might have been worse, however. Why, Phœbus has a very pretty little wife, I must pay my court to her. Let's risk the recognition," and going up to Dubotté, who was already making eyes at Aldegonde, Dodichet cried,—

"Why, Dubotté? my old-time friend, what an agreeable surprise! How d'ye do, Dubotté; is that your wife, you've brought here? Present me to her, my dear fellow, that I may compliment her on her husband."

Philémon Dubotté uttered an exclamation of

surprise on perceiving Dodichet, who was already shaking him by the hand, and he cried,—

"Why, how came you here? What, my dear Mirotaine, do you know this heedless fellow Dodichet?"

"What do you mean by your heedless fellow? I advise you to talk, you blond Phœbus, you. If your wife wasn't here I should have fine things to tell of you."

M. Mirotaine looked at the two friends very uneasily, and seemed to be waiting for Dubotté to explain himself more fully regarding the so-called sugar-broker, whose unceremonious manners did not seem to please him at all; but suddenly Philémon spied between the two crinolines of the Mesdames Boulard the gentleman who had been represented as a rich Italian count. He hastened towards him, exclaiming,—

"Why — I am altogether in a world of acquaintances, here is M. Seringat, the pharmacist, also, whom I had the pleasure of seeing at Pontoise a year ago. Good-day, M. Seringat, how is your wife?"

On hearing himself called by his right name, M. Seringat became pale, then purple; he carried his hand to his forehead with a gesture of despair and stammered,—

"No — that isn't true. I am Miflorès — I won't be called anything but Miflorès again. I don't know you."

And pushing aside the two crinolines which were beside him, as well as all the persons who stood in his way, this gentleman quickly left the drawing-room, took the first hat he could find in the antechamber, and disappeared, leaving everybody stupefied, except Dodichet, who threw himself into an easy chair, where he laughed at the effect this recognition had produced upon the ladies and gentlemen present.

M. Mirotaine was the first to recover the use of speech.

"What does this mean? How is this? This man, whom they presented to me as a rich Italian count, supposed to be seeking as a wife a young lady without a dowry, is an apothecary from Pontoise and a married man? Why, they must be making sport of me then! But who has wished to cheat me thus? Answer, M. Sugar-broker and you, Madame Putiphar, who take it upon you to make marriages — answer me?" M. Mirotaine glared at the company as he finished.

The dealer in toilet articles, who was greatly confused, pointed to Dodichet, hesitated and stammered,—

"But this gentleman told me that he had a friend — very rich — to marry. See now, monsieur, you told me so the other day at your little dinner, didn't you?"

"Yes, really," answered Dodichet, "I told you so because I thought I had. This scoundrel of a

Miflorès has deceived me also — you must see that I am very much put out about it. But, after all, M. Mirotaine, I don't see why you should be so very angry about it. This mistake has furnished you with an occasion for giving a dinner to your friends; therefore, you cannot regret it — and as for me, it has procured me the pleasure of making your acquaintance, which I hope to cultivate. I will bring you some samples of sugar and molasses of the first quality. In the meantime, I must follow the tracks of this miserable rascal Miflorès, who has so shamefully tricked me. He will have my life or I shall have his, but I very much prefer to have his. Mesdames, I bid you adieu."

Dodichet had disappeared almost as soon as M. Seringat.

"Do you really think that he is going to fight with the pretended count?" asked Mirotaine of Dubotté.

"Him! he fight with the other? it is easily seen that you don't know our friend Dodichet as well as I do! He's a humbug of the first water, and all this is nothing but a joke he wanted to play you for reasons of his own."

M. Mirotaine sank, overwhelmed, on a chair, muttering,—

"A dinner of eleven covers — oh, my bordeaux wine!"

"And the false count has carried off my hat,"

exclaimed M. Brid'oison, ferreting in the anteroom.

"Comfort yourself," said madame to him, "that which he has left you is a great deal newer than your own."

CHAPTER VII

How It Began

Madame Dermont occupied a very pretty little apartment in the Rue Paradis-Poissonnière; she had but one servant, but that was enough for a woman who lived alone, received very little company, and was always happier at home than in the midst of the most fashionable gatherings. This lady possessed eight thousand francs income — which would have been very little for one who wished to follow all the fashions and live in luxury and dissipation; but it was amply sufficient for the widow, who did not care to shine, and who loved to think.

Nathalie was in her drawing-room, seated at her piano, looking at her music. However, as her fingers rested motionless on the keys, it is probable that the young woman was thinking of something other than what was before her. This was two days after her visit to her young friend Juliette.

She was drawn from her revery by the ringing of the bell. The sound made her tremble, although she was expecting no one, at least she no longer expected the one of whom she was thinking.

The servant came and announced M. Adhémar

Monbrun. At this name Nathalie's trembling increased, her face was suffused with blushes; she tried to hide her emotion, glanced at her toilet, then told the maid to show the gentleman in.

Adhémar presented himself with that ease which society gives and which is above all the appanage of the artist and the literary man.

"I come rather late, madame," he began, "to thank you for having sent to inquire about the slight burn on my hand. You thought me very neglectful, did you not, madame, for showing so little haste in coming to offer my thanks to you?"

"Why, no, monsieur, not at all, you burned yourself for me and it was the least I could do to inform myself as to the condition of your hurt — that was my duty; while as for yourself, monsieur, nothing obliged you to put yourself out or lose your time by coming to see me."

"My dear madame, allow me to believe that you do not judge me so wrongly as to imagine that I look upon it as an inconvenience to come and see you, that would make me very unhappy; my coming can give me only pleasure, and the reason —"

"Well, monsieur — is what?"

"By Jove, I don't know how to tell you, it's most embarrassing."

"You, monsieur, embarrassed with a lady. Oh, I don't believe that for a moment; that is, unless you had something disagreeable to say to her, and then I can imagine what it would cost you."

"I don't think I could ever be disagreeable to you — however —"

"Well, you haven't said yet why you did not come."

"Well, you see, I thought that when a fellow had had the good luck to be received by you he would want to come again — often; in fact, often enough to displease you perhaps."

Nathalie looked down as she murmured,—

"And was that really why you did not come?"

"Yes; you know there's a proverb which says 'a burned child dreads the fire,' and you were the fire for me at that moment, madame."

"And yet you have sufficiently proved to me that you don't dread it. Do all the ladies frighten you? Frankly, monsieur, I don't believe it!"

"Oh, no, madame, some of them are nothing more than an ignis fatuus — and there is nothing to be feared in that!"

"A truce to joking, M. Adhémar, I want to see your wrist and assure myself that it is quite healed."

Adhémar rolled his cuff back and presented the wrist that had been burned. The better to examine it, Nathalie took the hand that was extended to her and drew it towards her, and the hand she thus touched pressed her own very tenderly, which greatly embarrassed the young woman, who stammered,—

"Yes, it has healed, but you have a great scar. Do you suppose it will always remain?"

"I hope so, I'm sure."

"What! you hope it will? Why should you hope that?"

"Because it will recall to me the day on which I had the happiness of being a little useful to you."

"A little — what makes you say that? a little! when you perhaps saved my life."

"Oh, if you were really indebted to me for anything, it would only remain with you to pay the debt."

"How is that?"

"Can't you divine, madame?"

"No, monsieur, I can't imagine at all."

"Oh, pardon me, you, above everyone, ought to be able to divine the thoughts which come from the heart."

"Why I more than anyone else?"

"Because there is something in your eyes that denotes perspicacity."

"If my eyes have such a peculiar expression I shall be afraid to raise them."

"Ah, don't deprive me of the sight of them — that would be a punishment indeed!"

"Stop, monsieur, don't say such things as those to me — you are in the habit of paying court to all the ladies, and they take it for what it is worth, for the greater part of them are accustomed to your speeches and laugh at them because they know too much to take seriously the gallant speeches of a man for whom love is only an agreeable pastime.

But I am not that kind of woman. I go very little into society, and artist life is unknown to me. In fact, if I were to take seriously what you say to me, if I were to place any faith in your speeches, confess now, should I not be very wrong and perhaps speedily repent me of it."

Adhémar remained silent for some moments, but he looked at Nathalie, and in his look was something of sadness.

"Ah, madame," he said, sighing, "if I were lucky enough to inspire a woman with love for me, I should be only too happy! but no, women are all inconstant, they never really love—they only wish to be adored—but they reserve the right of loving us only according to their own caprice."

Nathalie could not help laughing as she said,—

"You have a singular manner of paying your court to a lady."

"Pray, pardon me, I had no thought of you in speaking so."

"You were speaking of women in general, then?"

"Yes, but there must be exceptions, even in that case."

"And have you never met any of these—exceptions?"

"No, I have never had that happiness."

"And that has given you a bad opinion of all women?"

"Oh, I'm wrong, no doubt; for because they

have never loved me is no reason why they have not really loved others."

"Oh, and have none of them ever loved you, monsieur?"

"No, madame, never truly loved me."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Only too sure."

"But you, monsieur, who think you have never really been loved; on your side, have you ever really loved?"

Adhémar for some moments did not answer, then he said,—

"Why, yes, I think I have."

"Oh, you are not quite certain?"

"When any one is disposed to love very deeply, and finds that his love has not been reciprocated, don't you think that must be enough to cool his feeling?"

"No, monsieur, I certainly do not think so; I think when one is really in love it is very difficult to banish from one's heart the object which occupies it. In fact, I don't think reason has anything to do with love, and when reason reasserts her sway it is because love has flown. But, really, we are having a singular conversation; one would think we had to write a treatise on 'The proper manner of loving.' Have you brought out a new play, written a new novel since I last saw you?"

"No, madame, no — I have done nothing."

"You've been idle — that's very bad, that is."

"No, I haven't been idle, but I have been — preoccupied; that isn't quite the same thing, but it prevents one from working even more."

"You know M. Lucien Grischard, do you not, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame, I do — but how did you learn it?"

"Why, that was very simple; this M. Lucien knows, I may say is courting, a young person who is an intimate friend of mine — Mademoiselle Juliette Mirotaine."

"Yes, he is very much in love and would like to marry her — he told me that."

"On the other hand, Juliette has no secrets from me; she loves Lucien Grischard deeply, but her father refuses to let her marry him. She has told me all her sorrows."

"Very good! but I don't quite see how I came into them."

Nathalie blushed, hesitated, and at last answered,—

"If my friend tells me all that concerns herself, don't you think I should do as much, monsieur? This accident which happened to me, and which, but for you, might have proved fatal, I told her all about it, and naturally I told the name of the person who had burned himself in smothering the fire in my gown. On hearing your name—which is so well-known—she exclaimed, 'That gentleman is a friend of Lucien's.' That is how I became

aware that you knew him. Does this explanation suffice you, monsieur?"

"You are a thousand times too kind to have given it me. I only asked you because I wanted to know if you had been interested enough to remember me."

"It would have been very ungrateful on my part had I forgotten you and your courageous act so quickly."

"By Jove, madame, a very witty man once said, 'Ingratitude is the independence of the heart.' That's sad—but, it is half true!"

"No, monsieur, ingratitude proves only that one has no heart!"

The conversation was prolonged for some time between these two persons, who knew and understood each other so well, even when they were silent. However, this being his first visit to the widow, Adhémar, who was fearful of committing an indiscretion, took leave of Madame Dermont, saying,—

"Will you allow me to come and see you again?"

And Nathalie accorded him the desired permission with a smile so amiable and inviting that he could not doubt the pleasure she experienced in giving it.

As he left the pretty widow's, Adhémar said to himself,—

"That woman is charming—I feel that I could get very fond of her; perhaps it would be better

for me not to go back to see her; for if I were to let myself go and really get to love her, she'd very likely do as others have done, deceive me, make me unhappy. But I am talking as if the lady were already my sweetheart. What if she should never love me? Oh, but something tells me she will. And, after all, why should one fear being happy when an occasion for being so presents itself? 'Love is essential,' says Jean-Jacques. 'Love is essential,' says Voltaire; that perhaps is the sole subject on which these two celebrated men agree. Therefore, we must not repulse love when it wishes to slip into our hearts, and although it cause us more pain than pleasure, still that is much better than not loving at all."

For her part, Madame Dermont did not say all that, but she yielded to the leanings of her heart, which inclined her to love Adhémar; his person pleased her and, without being aware of it, she was already in love with him for what he had written. Now that she had made his acquaintance she experienced pleasure in hearing him talk, a secret sympathy led her towards him; despite all the evil that monsieur thought of women she did not try to fight that love which seized her heart; she hoped to oblige him to render justice to her sex, for, not being inconstant in her tastes, she could not believe that all women were light and flighty.

It was, therefore, with delight, with happiness, that she heard Adhémar ask her permission to come

and see her, and if she was not then able to hide the pleasure which his entreaty had given her, it was because she was not coquettish, and did not seek to dissimulate her real feelings under a feigned indifference.

CHAPTER VIII

The Dubotté Household

It is time that we should occupy ourselves with this husband who was adored by his wife, a thing that is seen sometimes, but which is by no means common; and then, instead of being proud of his good fortune, instead of showing himself, by his little attentions, his amiable temper, grateful for this conjugal love, these tender kisses, of which his spouse was so prodigal — this gentleman seemed, on the contrary, to be very weary of and excessively bored by madame's caresses. He even repulsed them sometimes on frivolous pretexts. For men are thus made, and if their wives deceive them, they immediately fall in love with them again. Poor human beings, you complain when you possess your wife's affection and complain more loudly when you do not possess it. You are never contented, and thus it is in everything. As for me, all my life I have heard men complain in love, in politics, in business; I have always found people discontented; I have at all epochs, under all governments, heard brokers, merchants and shopkeepers say, "There is nothing doing! business is very dull," and other complaints of the

same kind; which does not prevent business from going on as usual, some making fortunes, others failing, as has been seen in all times.

After the precipitate flight of the Italian count and the sugar-broker, one can easily understand that the company assembled at M. Mirotaine's was left very much disturbed and agitated; those who had been at the dinner and who understood the object of that repast, looked at each other without saying anything; those who had not come until the evening, on the contrary, addressed a great number of questions to the master of the house and his wife, and for their part, the latter did not cease to interrogate Dubotté, who had discovered the mystery.

"In fact," cried M. Mirotaine, "you are sure, my dear Dubotté, that this so-called Count Miflorès is M. Seringat?"

"Perfectly certain: M. Seringat, apothecary at Pontoise. I passed nearly two months in that town, where I went to receive an inheritance. You remember, Nonore?"

"I should think so, indeed; I was lonely enough while you were away. I did nothing but cry."

"You cry a great deal too much when I am away, my darling; you must cure yourself of that habit, which will make your eyes as red as a rabbit's. But during my stay at Pontoise I on several occasions found myself in gatherings at which M. Seringat also was present."

"And he is married?"

"Very well married, to a very pretty woman, who, I am sure, does not amuse herself by crying when her husband is away. I even had the pleasure of dancing with her at a party given by the notary of the neighborhood."

"You horrid man, you danced without me!"

"My darling, if in marrying a man debarred himself from dancing a rigadoon, except with his wife, that would disgust men with marriage altogether. You can't seem to get it into your head that, even though a man be married, he should nevertheless be gallant and amiable with other ladies. I have told you so a hundred times."

"And his wife?"

"Hang it! his wife has the same rights; above all, she should not, as you do, keep her husband in her pocket all the time,—fie! it is bad form—it's devilish hard on a poor beggar. You really must cure yourself of that! I don't want you to be ridiculous."

"But," resumed M. Mirotaine, "What do you imagine can be M. Seringat's motive for presenting himself in a respectable house under a name which is not his own, and as a man who wishes to marry?"

"Did he tell you he wanted to marry?"

"He did not breathe a word," said Aldegonde, "and he did not once try to talk with Juliette."

"Then, what makes you say he wants to marry? for, at least, unless his wife be dead—but that

seems to me very improbable, for she was young, and as fresh as a rose."

"You noticed that, Philémon?"

"My dearest, I beg of you, don't carp at everything I say — I have noticed a great many women since then."

"Oh, you bad boy! and me?"

"You are my wife and that ought to suffice you; it seems to me that is quite enough for you. In short, my dear Mirotaine, I repeat to you, all this must be a joke got up by my friend Dodichet, who passes his time in seeking whom he can make game of; and, although he was my comrade at boarding school, I have never invited him to come and see me, not that I am afraid of his mischief. Thank God! I have a wife who is such that I can sleep with both eyes shut."

"Besides, my dear, that's what you do, you always sleep with me."

"Hush, Nonore! Those details are never spoken of in society."

"Why is that, my dear?"

"Why — because —"

M. Mirotaine was as cross as a bear at having given a grand dinner to no purpose. Aldegonde was vexed at having been deceived by her toilet merchant, who had already departed quite confused at having made such a fiasco; for it is thus that people speak of an affair that hangs fire, a play that does not succeed, or a joke that does not make

people laugh. The rest of the party was not long in following Madame Putiphar; the three balloons retired, each bumping the other; M. Brid'oison put on the hat that was left in place of his own; young Artaban leaped on his sire's shoulders; Madame Trichon went off, rubbing the eye which had been struck by the pickled onion; and young Callé retreated, looking at Aldegonde, who did not notice him because she was angry. Juliette alone was pleased, but she did not dare let it be seen.

Dubotté and his wife did the same as the others — took their leave.

"It's a spoiled evening," said Philémon to young Callé, who was putting on his gloves as he went downstairs. "It's only ten o'clock, what the devil shall we do now?"

"Seven minutes past ten," said the young dandy, looking at his watch, "and I keep as good time as the Treasury."

"That's all right! but one can't go to bed at seven minutes past ten — I detest to go to bed early."

"You always want me to go to bed early, however, my dear."

"Yes, it is healthful for women, they need more rest than we. Which way do you go, M. Callé?"

"To the Rue de La-Tour-d'Auvergne, number eight, monsieur."

"Why, we live in the Rue Bleue; not two steps from there. M. Callé, are you related to a Callé at Lyons, a wholesale silk merchant?"

"He's my cousin, monsieur."

"By Jove, he's one of my best friends! when we were boys he often came to Paris; we've had a good many sprees together."

"What, my dear, you have had — sprees? — you?"

"Nonore, I was speaking to this gentleman; that has nothing to do with you. So you are Edouard Callé's cousin?"

"I have that honor."

"Confound it! what a bore to have to go in at ten o'clock."

"My dear, if you want to take me somewhere, I would just as soon go."

"Why, no, madame, no, I don't want to take you anywhere now. It's past the time for going to the theatre, there's nothing to be done but to go to a café, and a man doesn't take his wife to a café, it is very bad form; besides, women are bored there, they have to be so straitlaced."

"But you go there a good deal yourself."

"Yes, I go to my club; a club composed of very good fellows; where they play cards, and I confess I have a great desire to go there and have a game of whist."

"Well, take me to your club."

"The idea, as though women were received there. Women at a club! is there no way of making you understand anything? I greatly desire to go, but it doesn't lie in quite the same direction as

my house. Now, I think of it! as M. Callé lives in our neighborhood, it would not put him out much to leave you at our door; and that would enable me to go to my club."

"Monsieur, I am quite at your service, and it will afford me great pleasure to see madame home."

"What! Philémon, you are going to leave me? you want me to go with a gentleman whom I don't know?"

"By Jove! Nonore, it seems to me there's nothing very alarming about monsieur. He's a friend of Mirotaine's and a cousin of a person with whom I am very intimate; he is not a stranger to me."

"Oh, that is all right; only you know I'm in the habit of taking no one's arm but yours."

"Exactly so, and it is a ridiculous habit and one which you must drop."

And taking his arm from beneath his wife's the handsome fair man presented the latter to the young man, who was waiting in a very modest attitude, and said to him,—

"My dear M. Callé, I confide my wife to you, and I am very tranquil in so doing, for I am persuaded you will not lose her."

"Oh, no, monsieur, I will not leave madame until she is in the house."

"Thank you! Good evening. Nonore, go to bed at once, I shan't be in till late —"

"Philémon! Philémon — you are going without kissing me!"

But Philémon was already at a distance; delighted at having his wife taken off his hands, he had run off like an athlete. The loving Eléonore heaved a deep sigh and decided at last to take the arm which young Callé extended towards her. They set off walking, the little woman still sighing, her escort racking his head to think what he could say to console her; he summoned his wits and stammered at length,—

"If we are going too fast, madame, we might walk more slowly."

"Oh, it is all right as we are going."

And they continued on their way in silence. However, the little woman, who loved to talk, was the first to open the conversation.

"You are not married, I suppose, monsieur?"

"No, madame, I am a bachelor."

"When you are married, monsieur, shall you allow your wife to be taken home by your acquaintances?"

"By Jove! madame, I confess that I don't know what I should do."

"Would you think it wrong that your wife should always want to go out with you?"

"Why, I think not, madame."

"Would you be bored if she wanted to kiss you often?"

"Most assuredly not — on the contrary, above all if — above all if she — in fact, it would not bore me at all."

M. Callé had tried to pay a compliment to the young matron who was holding his arm, but he had not been successful. Eléonore resumed,—

"Well, my husband often repulsès me when I take a fancy to kiss him."

"Oh, he does it for fun, no doubt."

"No, monsieur; he even scolds me; he asserts that I have common manners — that it is only workmen's wives who kiss their husbands like that. Is that true?"

"Oh, I can't tell you that, madame."

"Then, I regret that my husband is not a working man, because then I could kiss him when it pleased me without his thinking me ridiculous."

Callé made no answer, but to himself he said,—

"This lady, it seems, is very fond of kissing. If I were her husband I should do the kissing myself. She's not so fine a woman as Madame Mirotaine, but she has a very sweet expression, and then it seems she is very caressing."

They reached Dubotté's house, Eléonore thanked her escort; the latter bowed respectfully and essayed several compliments which he could not finish, but which she acknowledged by bows, and the young woman went in, saying to herself,—

"He's very polite, is that gentlemen; only, he doesn't talk enough."

M. Dubotté, who on that evening returned home very late, having been elsewhere than to his club, did his best to go to bed without awakening his

wife, a manœuvre which he executed so often that he had become an adept at it. The next day, as he dressed himself, he said to madame,—

"Well, my dear, were you pleased with your escort? You got home without accident?"

"Oh, of course. The young man was very kind, he came right up to the door with me."

"Hang it! did you suppose he would leave you half way. You invited him to come and see us, I hope?"

"Oh, no — why should I?"

"It was a duty — a compliment you owed him — he pleases me, this little Callé. I should be pleased for him to come and see us — he's a young man to whom one could trust one's wife."

"But, my dear, are you expecting to have me accompanied by another man as a usual thing?"

"I didn't infer that, but there are unforeseen circumstances. For instance, we have tickets to the theatre — you know very well that I often have them because of my connection with the actors, well, I can't go, say; or I can only go very late — then what do I do? Why, I ask Callé to take you to the play, and I come and join you when I have finished my business — you understand?"

"What! you would let me go to the theatre with some one else? oh, Philémon!"

"Why, if I join you there later on, it is precisely the same as if I went with you — that is one of the things that are done every day."

"I should not be amused at all at the theatre unless you were with me."

"You don't seem to understand that I should go also — later on."

"That is not the same thing."

"Ah, you are behind the times, my dear, good wife, you are behind the times. Fortunately, I know this young man's address; he told us himself that he lives at No. 8 Rue de La-Tour-d'Auvergne."

"And do you want to go and see him?"

"Since I was intimate with his cousin, and he can give me news of him. Wait! I have an idea! I'll invite him to dinner, he's a fellow of good tone, not like that low beast Dodichet, whom I never shall invite — and that was nice, what he did to Mirotaine. But why was this M. Seringat, the Pontoise apothecary, in Paris, and under another name? What can he have done with his wife? If I had time I would go to Pontoise to satisfy myself."

"You would take me with you, in that case, would you not?"

"Ah, that's it, is it? That would be very amusing, to put one's wife in one's pocket for a little journey of twenty-four hours — to double and treble the expenses, that would be amazingly stupid; but, reassure yourself, I haven't time to go to Pontoise."

Some days later Dubotté said to his wife,—

"My dearest, I must warn you that we shall

have two people to dinner tomorrow; tell the servant to prepare the meal carefully and not to forget, above all, to have something in the way of sweets; you know that I don't dine well unless there is a sweet dish."

"Yes, you are too dainty."

"All men who love the women must be fond of sweet things."

"Ah, you are much too fond of them, you bad boy!"

"Too fond of sweets?"

"No, of women; if you bestowed all your love on your own wife it wouldn't so much matter."

"My darling, I might answer you; I'm extremely fond of chocolate cream; however, if you were to give me chocolate cream every day, I might get tired of it."

"What do you mean by that? that you no longer care for anything but chocolate cream?"

"That was a joke; think about your dinner for tomorrow."

"Whom have you invited? Oh, my two dearest friends, I wager, Madame Lambert and her sister."

"No, I haven't invited your friends; Madame Lambert takes snuff and I think that odious in a woman — if she would only smoke, it wouldn't matter. There are some very pretty women who smoke now; but that snuff-box business is detestable, when she takes out her handkerchief one would imagine one was in a porter's lodge. As to

her sister, that's another thing; no matter when you look at her she jerks her head on one side and shakes it and winks her eyes."

"She can't help that, it's a twitching."

"I don't say she can help it, but I don't like people who twitch, I am always afraid of wanting to do the same as they do. I have two gentlemen coming to dinner — that's a good deal more cheerful, one isn't afraid to laugh, can be less straitlaced. First of all I have Bruneau, one of my fellow-clerks — "

"Oh, I don't like your friend Bruneau — a man who is good for nothing but to smoke and drink beer; and who only feels happy when he's in a café. As soon as he's had his dinner he'll want to go to a café, no doubt — and how pleasant that is for me; if he would go alone I should have no objection, but he always takes you with him."

"Why, no, not always — sometimes only — and then it's to make up a game at dominos, at which he is very skilful."

"And the other gentlemen?"

"The other — can't you guess who he is? — it's the young man who was so obliging as to see you home the other evening — M. Callé."

"You've called on him then?"

"I was going there when I met him. He gave me news of his cousin, we talked for a long time; he seems to me a nice enough fellow."

"That's strange, he said hardly anything to me."

"He looks very bashful. In short, I invited him to come to dinner tomorrow, and he seemed highly flattered at my invitation."

"Why should you ask this young man to dinner?"

"My dearest, we must see a few people sometimes. Devil take it! we can't live like bears."

"You never invite my friends."

"If there were some pretty women among them, I would, you may be sure; but I don't know which one is the ugliest."

"That doesn't prevent them from being agreeable."

"I find them deadly tiresome."

Young Callé, who had been much gratified by Dubotté's invitation, did not fail to repair to the latter's dwelling at the appointed time, after minutely caring for the details of his toilet. For, if he was bashful, that did not prevent his being vain about his dress. Eléonore welcomed this gentleman, who had served as her escort graciously enough, although the latter could never manage to get through any compliment he endeavored to pay her; but the little woman felt more at her ease with a timid young man, and this guest pleased her more than M. Bruneau, the gentleman who frequented cafés.

The latter was a man of forty, neither handsome nor ugly, but extremely careless as to his attire; there was always something loose and untidy in his

appearance, although his garments were as fine as those of other people. But in general the way in which one's clothes are worn and kept is everything; one sees men who wear very good clothing indeed who never have the appearance of having made their toilet, while others look perfectly correct in the most simple costume. M. Bruneau never wore gloves, he always looked dirty and smelled of his pipe a league off. He passed all his leisure, after office hours, in playing dominos or drinking beer or absinthe. For him women were of no more account than a double blank. But Dubotté liked Bruneau very much, because when he had to keep an appointment of a gallant nature he had but to make a sign to his friend, and the latter never failed to say to him,—

"Come with me to the café for a moment, those clever fellows at dominos are waiting for us, we'll play two games and the rubber, no more — and you shall come back to your wife."

Dubotté would accept, promise Eléonore to return speedily, and spend the whole evening outside. You can understand very well that such friends as this pleased madame very ill, and that she preferred to them a young man who, through timidity, stammered when he paid her a compliment.

Dubotté received Callé as if he had known him for a long time; he shook hands with him effusively — almost embraced him. They sat down to table and during the conversation Dubotté exclaimed,—

"Hang it! I know now why Dodichet played that trick on poor Mirotaine. It's just occurred to me that one of our mutual friends, a poor fellow named Lucien, is in love with Mademoiselle Mirotaine. Did you know that, my dear Callé?"

"Yes, I have heard Madame Mirotaine speak of it — but this young man not having anything they refuse to give Mademoiselle Juliette to him."

"It's so, Lucien told us all that the last time we met; he's afraid that a rich man will marry this young person, who has no dowry but who is very pretty. Is she not, Nonore?"

"Oh, yes, for those who like brunettes."

"And I remember that Dodichet said to Lucien on that occasion, 'Do you want me to serve you in any way in your love affair? what a good trick I'll play your old hunks of a Mirotaine.' He called him 'old hunks' because the latter is very close, very avaricious, you must have perceived it?"

"I didn't notice it, monsieur."

"Why, it was extremely wrong to do as this gentleman did — get himself invited to dinner, he and his friend!"

"And by Mirotaine, too, I think it was very clever. Dodichet is really much cleverer than I had thought he was."

"What does this gentleman do?"

"Oh, by Jove! nothing; he has wasted all he possessed in joking and making game of everyone. But where does that lead him? To dying of hun-

ger; for, as a matter of fact, we can all make something of ourselves, make a good position, can we not, Bruneau?"

"How? What did you say?"

"Oh, you never know what anyone is talking about?"

"Give me something to drink; that's worth more than all your talking."

"I would say that each one has an end, an object here below; I know very well what my own is, and I shall attain it. You, M. Callé, must have an end also. What is it? you wish to arrive somewhere also, don't you?"

"Arrive where, monsieur?"

"That I don't know. What is your occupation?"

"I have none, monsieur. I live at ease—I have ten thousand francs income."

"Then that is different; you have arrived."

"I," said M. Bruneau, "am one of the best domino players in Paris — and that is exactly what I wanted to arrive at. Do you play dominos, monsieur?"

"No, monsieur, I know how to play nothing but bezique."

"Oh, do you play bezique?" cried Dubotté, "that's my wife's favorite game; she loves to play a game of bezique; don't you, Nonore?"

"Why, my dear, I like to play it with you."

"Yes, but it will please you much better to play it

with some one else; for, between ourselves, whether we play for two sous or ten, we never pay either—and that is so amusing. With another one gets really interested in the game and tries to defend one's money, it is always a good deal more spicy."

After dinner Dubotté hastened to have a card table carried in, then he said to Callé,—

"You'll have a game of bezique with my wife? she plays very well."

"Willingly, monsieur, I will do anything you like."

"My dear, would it not be much better that you should play with this gentleman, you are a much better player than I."

"Not at all; I tell you that you play the game perfectly."

"But what will you do while we are playing?"

"I shall watch you and talk with my friend Bruneau; don't be uneasy about that."

The little woman only decided to take the cards in order to obey her husband, because she doubted that he wouldn't remain long watching the game. Young Callé, who was willing to make himself agreeable, seated himself opposite Eléonore, stammering,—

"How shall we play it, madame?"

"That is all the same to me."

"With how many packs?"

"I do not know."

"Well, how many shall we play with?"

"Just as you like."

"Why, confound it, my dear, don't be so stupid as all that! you play with four packs; ten sous in two thousand, we make the five hundred, and the fifteen hundred with three beziques — that's how we always play it. Is that your way, Callé?"

"Oh, I play it all ways."

The game began, at first Dubotté remained near the table, watched the play and exclaimed from time to time,—

"Bravo, Nonore, bravo! you are playing finely, you will beat your adversary. Callé, I believe my wife will beat you."

"I should like her to do so, monsieur."

Then when the game was well in hand Dubotté made a sign to Bruneau, who said,—

"Durand will be at the café this evening, and I must talk with him about business."

"Well, come down there for a moment with me."

"In fact, it isn't two steps, I must go there and say two words to him."

Dubotté took his hat, and his wife exclaimed,—

"What, Philémon, are you going out?"

"For ten minutes only, then I will return."

"And monsieur — who is here?"

"Hang it! I don't stand on ceremony with M. Callé, he'll willingly permit me to absent myself for a moment."

"Oh, monsieur, as long as you like, don't put yourself out for me."

"Besides, you have your game, play it! play it — make the five hundred! I shall soon be back."

"But Philémon —"

"In ten minutes I'll be here!"

And the handsome fair man escaped with his accomplice Bruneau. Nonore heaved a deep sigh, but she continued to play. At midnight Callé was still playing bezique with the young woman, who had won four francs from him, but was beginning to yawn. When the clock struck twelve, she cried,—

"You see, monsieur, what my husband means by being absent for ten minutes."

"He's been detained, or his watch is wrong."

"No, it is so every time he goes out, and it makes me very unhappy. But it is midnight, and I will not longer abuse your kindness. My husband was impolite to invite you and then go out."

"Oh, madame, I assure you that I don't mind his going — all the more because —"

"Good evening, M. Callé."

"Madame, I have the honor to wish you good evening."

And the young man left without being able to finish his compliment.

CHAPTER IX

Drive Away Natural Impulses, They Return at a Gallop

A month had elapsed since Adhémar had made his first visit to Madame Dermont; in the week that followed this interview he had called on her every two days, and later on he had not allowed a single one to pass without seeing her. What had, then, passed between them that their connection should have become so intimate? It seems to me that you ought to be able to guess that.

Nathalie had immediately captivated Adhémar's heart; she was the woman for whom he had been looking, whom he had desired to meet, whom he ardently desired to have as his mistress, and whose love he craved above all things; in her were united all the qualities he had hoped and wished to find in a sweetheart. However, he had sought for some time — not a very long time, it must be confessed — to struggle against the inclination of his heart; for in proportion as he felt he could love this young woman truly, the more he foresaw that he should suffer if he were unfortunate enough to evoke only a frivolous sentiment in return for a sincere love.

Nathalie, on the contrary, had not sought to

combat the feelings which Adhémar inspired in her. A widow, and entirely her own mistress, what reason was there that she should repulse the love which she read in his eyes, and which they expressed so well? A coquettish woman might perhaps have deferred for a long time the moment of her submission; but a woman who really loves opposes but a feeble resistance, for she shares the happiness she bestows.

And now Adhémar often said to Nathalie,—

"Is it really quite true that you love me?"

"How can you ask me that, dear? and what further proof do you wish me to give as to my love?"

"Pardon me, that was not what I meant to say. I fear only — for I am sometimes not as agreeable as I should be — I fear that — that you will presently cease to love me."

"Ah, how ill you judge me! Do you take me, then, for one of those women for whom love is only a caprice and never a feeling?"

"No, no, I do not judge you thus — I am wrong, I am often unjust —

"You fear lest I should not always find you agreeable — what folly! When you are near me I am happy and that suffices me. You may be as dreamy, as pensive, as serious, even, as you please — if I do but see you, if I am but with you, I desire nothing more. I say to myself, 'He is thinking of his work — some plot perhaps; I must

not disturb him. But presently he will return to me, he will become conscious that I am with him.'"

"Nathalie, I love you so much — sometimes it seems to me I love you too much."

"It's impossible to love too much, dear, when one inspires as much love as one gives. Believe me, you do not go one step farther in loving than I do."

As he left Madame Dermont's, Adhémar said to himself,—

"Yes, she really loves me; indeed, if she did not love me, there is no reason why she should pretend to do so. What motive could she have in deceiving me? She is not guided by interest, she does not wish to receive the slightest present from me; she has positively declared that she will be seriously displeased with me if I ever offer her anything but flowers. 'I have money enough to gratify all my tastes, all my fancies,' she said to me, 'I want nothing of you but your love; the slightest gift on your part would be distasteful to me, for I should say, "He thinks I need that to make me love him."' I must obey her. Come, I have at last found a woman who will not betray me! It is miraculous."

As the price of her love, Madame Dermont asked only her lover's entire confidence. She would not admit that he was jealous, and often said to him, "It is offensive to the one you love to suspect her, and since you are quite certain that

I love you, you should not imagine for an instant that I could betray you."

Adhémar thought Natalie perfectly right, but jealousy is a feeling that one cannot command; one is born jealous as one is born quarrelsome, or of a teasing disposition, or a coward. Education may teach us to conceal our defects, but it does not destroy them.

One morning, on going to Madame Dermont's a little earlier than he had been in the habit of doing, he found that lady with an expression of care on her face, and although she received him with her usual warmth it seemed to him that she was distracted, and that her smile was not as frank as usual. He looked at her steadily, he fixed his eyes on hers, and said to her,—

"You are vexed at something this morning, are you not?"

"I, my dear? Why, no, I assure you."

"You seem preoccupied—are you in trouble?"

"What trouble do you think I should have?"

"I don't think you should have any, but I ask you if you have."

"My dear, so long as you love me, I shall never have any."

"So much the better, for you will never have any, in that case. Are you unhappy because we are not always together? But you know that in my absence you are at liberty to receive any one you please."

"My dear, you are mistaken, you are never absent from me, for you are incessantly in my thoughts."

Adhémar pressed his lips to his mistress' hand. But after some minutes his brow clouded and drawing a long breath he exclaimed,—

"It is singular!"

"What is it that you find singular, my dear?"

"The smell of tobacco there is here."

"Do you think so? I smell nothing."

"Because you don't want to smell it. There is a smell of tobacco, and of bad tobacco, too. One would think some one had been smoking a pipe here."

Madame Dermont turned away her head, as she answered,—

"It's the water porter who has brought that smell in to us, perhaps."

"The water porter! I don't suppose he comes into your bedroom, and your kitchen is quite at a distance. Your answer is not a happy one."

"Good heavens, my dear, what do you mean by that. My answer is not a happy one! Surely, you attach no importance to a little thing like that?"

"A little thing! Well, madame, the proverb says, 'There is no fire without smoke'—and consequently no smell of tobacco without smoke. I probably came too soon today."

"What do you mean by that, monsieur?"

"I mean—it is very easy to understand! You

have received a visit from some one who smokes. Devil take it! a man doesn't stand on much ceremony with a lady when he smokes in her bedroom. Who has been to see you so early?"

Nathalie walked impatiently about her room, and muttered,—

"All these questions because of an odor which may come from a neighbor's."

"Oh, no, besides, you have no neighbors on this side."

"And is this all the confidence you have in me, Adhémar? Did you not tell me, 'I shall never be jealous'?"

"How strange women are! when one asks them anything they reply with a question, which is only a clever way of not answering at all. Will you tell me whom you received this morning, who did not hesitate to smoke in your house, or who, at any rate, poisoned it with the smell of his pipe."

"Nobody, monsieur."

"Very well, madame. I came too early today; it is a lesson for another time."

And taking his hat Adhémar quickly left Nathalie who made a movement to restrain him, but resisted her desire and drew back. Adhémar, as he went off, said to himself,—

"She certainly did receive a smoker, although she would not confess it. I don't assert that no one should call on her, but if that had been an innocent visit, she would not have denied it. So

she has secrets, and from me. That means that she is deceiving me. She is no better than the rest. Ah, I should have expected it! Well, it is all done with; I shan't go to see her again."

All day long the poor jealous lover kept repeating these words, "I won't go to see her again." And he went into society and to the cafés and theatres, and did all that was possible to turn his thoughts from her, but he could not accomplish it. The next day he was very dismal indeed and said to himself, "I shan't go near her. What a pity that I should love her so much more than I have ever loved before. That is what makes her treachery so shameful. I was quite right to wish to refrain from attaching myself to anyone."

As he walked along, Adhémar came to Madame Dermont's house. He stopped and said to himself, "It's all a matter of habit, I came as far as here without being aware that I was doing so. But I shan't go in. After all I may as well walk this way as elsewhere. I will look up at her windows, that will give me something to do."

And for a couple of hours he walked in front of the house, looking at Nathalie's windows; turning away when he saw some one at the casement and sighing when he saw no one. Suddenly someone tapped him on the shoulder; it was one of his colleagues, who said to him,—

"What are you doing, Adhémar? are you trying to unravel a plot? to work out a denouement?"

"By Jove, yes — I was thinking of a new subject."

"Come with me — you shall unfold your idea to me as we walk along."

"I'm quite willing to accompany you, but I am afraid I can't tell you anything, for you would want to have something to do with the piece."

"Well, what of that? I should do my part."

"Thank you, I know you, you do nothing but lounge about, you say disagreeable things, you pick your comrades to pieces, you think everything bad that is done by others, and you produce nothing yourself."

"You're really very nice this morning, I am the author of several pieces, however, which have had quite a success!"

"Yes, I am well aware of that, but that doesn't prove that you had anything to do with them. We know how such things are done in the theatres now, all the intriguing and scheming that goes on in them."

"You are in a very bad temper today! Do you know that I could demand satisfaction for what you are saying to me?"

"I am at your orders. Would you like to fight? I ask nothing better."

"And I have no desire to do so. You are in a bad temper — I am not. You are seeking a quarrel — I am seeking a pleasure party. Good-by."

"He is right," thought Adhémar, when his com-

rade had departed. "I am in an evil mood — because she has made me unhappy. For it is always the women who are at the bottom of all our moods."

The next day, after hesitating for a long time, Adhémar could contain himself no longer. He could not resist the desire he felt to see her whom he was trying in vain to forget. He said to himself, "The idea of getting angry and breaking with her, all because of a smell of tobacco; — which, after all, might come from the neighbors — why, that wasn't common sense." He did not run, he flew to Madame Dermont's, he did not give the servant time to warn her mistress, but entered precipitately. Nathalie was alone, but her eyes were red, and there were still tears in them. Adhémar threw himself at her feet, and snatching her hands and covering them with kisses said,—

"Forgive me! forgive me! I have caused you grief. Please, forgive me."

"Three days without coming to see me. Oh, my dear, is that how you love me!"

"Why, yes, I do love you — adore you, and that is why I am jealous."

"I had forbidden you to be so, and you had promised me."

"I am guilty — yes — since I have caused your tears to flow."

"I said to myself, 'It is all ended, he will come no more.'"

"As if I could possibly stay away! as if I could

exist without you! But let us forget this storm! You will pardon me, won't you?"

"Yes, of course. But take my advice, and don't give way to your jealous feelings. Suspicion galls the most loving heart."

"It won't occur again; I am cured."

So peace was made, and the most perfect accord reigned again between these two persons, who seemed made to love each other. A fortnight had passed since the reconciliation when the accursed odor of tobacco again became evident at Madame Dermont's, when her lover came in to see her during the day. Adhémar said nothing. He did not wish to appear as if he had even noticed the smell of a pipe. He tried to be cheerful, amiable, as was his custom, but in spite of himself he was absent-minded, he often answered at cross-purposes what Nathalie said to him. The latter, who guessed the cause of his preoccupation, looked embarrassed.

However, Adhémar had prolonged his visit, and had been for some time at Madame Dermont's, when, as he looked about him, he perceived some object on the floor, lying near the long curtain which draped the window, partly covered, but not entirely hidden by it. The object, rather singular in form, attracted the curiosity of our author, and, seizing a moment when Nathalie was arranging her flowers, he quickly went and picked up that which he had seen; he was stupefied on seeing that it was a pipe case.

"You cannot tell me this time that you do not receive a smoker," exclaimed Adhémar in a voice stifled by anger.

"Why, whatever is the matter, my dear?" said Nathalie, leaving her flowers.

"What is the matter? By Jove, a very trifling thing! Here, madame, is what I have just picked up — there beside your window, where, no doubt, you hoped it would be well hid."

"And what is it, monsieur?"

"You don't know what it is, madame?"

"No, I assure you that I cannot even guess what it is."

"Well, it is a pipe case — a very ugly case; poisonous, in fact. The pipe is not in it, probably because the person to whom it belongs has gone out to smoke it."

Nathalie reddened, her brow became overcast with gloom, but she remained silent. Adhémar's anger increased, he examined the case again, then he presented it to the young woman.

"Wait, madame, take it and give it back to the one to whom it belongs. Ah, I wasn't wrong the other day when I accused you of receiving a smoker."

"Well, monsieur, what of that? all the men smoke now!"

"All the men. Oh, you confess now that you did receive a man — and in your bedroom. Who is this man? Where does he come from? Where

does he go to? What does he come here for? and how long has he been coming? Answer me those questions, if you please, madame!"

"No, monsieur, no; I will not answer when anyone questions me as you are doing now."

"Oh, I understand — that is the best way out of it. When these ladies can't find a prevarication quickly enough, they retrench themselves in their dignity. But while that may do for simpletons, I hope you don't confuse me with them — I have too much self-respect!"

"Adhémar, what you are saying is very wrong! Is that the way you keep your promises?"

"Madame, one is never jealous without reason. I was right the other time, today I have proof of it. You have intrigues, madame; and when a woman has intrigues, when she secretly receives men — one knows very well what that means —"

"Oh, monsieur!"

"You have deceived me like the others, I ought to have expected it. But I thought I had met some one who was better this time. Oh, the women. But it is ended; hereafter I shall not be a dupe."

Adhémar threw the fatal pipe case on the floor, then he went out without looking at Nathalie.

CHAPTER X

A Young Man Who Did Not Smoke

You are aware that after the famous dinner given by M. Mirotaine, when Dubotté had recognized, in the so-called Italian count, a former apothecary of Pontoise, the latter had immediately left the company, and a very short time thereafter M. Fanfan Dodichet had done the same, announcing that he was going to challenge Miflorès, who, he said, had deceived him in saying he was a bachelor. But once outside the Mirotaines' doors, instead of seeking M. Seringat, whom he expected to find easily enough the next day at his own house, Dodichet betook himself to M. Lucien Grischard's, for he was desirous of telling that young man at once all that he had done in behalf of his love affairs.

When he arrived at the Quai Jemmapes by the Faubourg du Temple bridge, Dodichet said to himself, "At which corner of the Faubourg is it? To the right? or to the left? I forgot to ask him. No matter, I can go to both. On the right used to be, so they tell me, the famous Vendanges de Bourgogne, a caterer's, renowned for its sheep's trotters, and which formerly was in great request for

weddings and festive occasions. 'Sic transit gloria mundi!' To the left there were formerly, I think, only marshes. Let's begin on the left. I can't count on Lucien's being in, a bachelor does not stay in his chamber in the evening — often, even, he goes out during the day and sometimes is not there at night. But, never mind, perhaps they can tell me to what café he has the habit of going to smoke, for it is impossible that he should not smoke somewhere."

And in the first house where Dodichet inquired for Lucien Grischard they answered him,—

"Yes, he lives here, monsieur."

"Oh, he lives here! Very good! And where can one find him in the evening?"

"Why, at home, monsieur."

"What! he stays at home in the evening — he doesn't go out?"

"Very rarely, monsieur —"

"Then, where is he now?"

"Go up to the sixth floor, the door to the left — you will find him at home."

Dodichet as he ascended the stairs muttered to himself,—

"A strange fellow this, to stay at home in the evening! Still, he may receive ladies here — but, yet, it is hardly likely."

When he got to the sixth floor, Dodichet knocked at the door that had been indicated to him, and a voice cried,—

"Come in, the key's outside."

Dodichet opened the door, and found himself in a small room with a very sloping ceiling. An uncurtained bed, a large table which served as a desk, two chairs and a mirror comprised almost all the furniture; however, the room had quite the appearance of being very well furnished, for on all sides the walls were lined with shelves — like those of a library; only, instead of books, one saw on these shelves a series of little cardboard boxes all of equal size. Then on the table were a great many more, but the latter were empty, and at this moment Lucien, seated in front of the table, was busied in placing in these boxes big black safety pins, of which he had before him an immense quantity. The young dealer had on as a dressing-gown a flannel jacket, patched in several places, and wore on his head a kind of cap that was minus its vizor. A small lamp did poor service in lighting this retreat; however, Lucien immediately recognized his visitor, and thus greeted him,—

"Hallo! Dodichet! What lucky chance gives me the pleasure of seeing you? I did not expect it!"

"I am quite sure you did not. But I greatly prefer to go where I am not expected. So this is your lodging, is it?"

"Yes, my dear fellow!"

"And there's just this one room, and that is all?"

"Absolutely all. That is quite enough for a single man."

"Quite enough! you are not very difficult to please. But where are you going to put me?"

"Wherever you like!"

"Wherever I like! But I don't see a chair."

"Why, yes, I've got two of them. Wait— the other is hidden under my clothing, it serves as a bureau. I'll take the things off it."

Lucien carried the clothing from the chair to the bed, then he returned to his occupation, saying to his visitor,—

"Now, sit down, and tell me what brought you here. As for me I shall go on with my work, for it is pressing."

"Oh, don't bother about me, I shall go on all right. You've got confoundedly little room here! What the devil are you doing there?"

"As you see I'm putting these pins in the boxes. I have to lay them carefully so there are the same number in each box."

"And does this business bring you in a little something?"

"Oh, so-so, but it looks as though it was going to take. Why, my fortune would have been made had I, like Rozière of Romainville, known how to discover all that they can do with panama."

"Panama? why they make a kind of straw hat there, don't they?"

"Yes, and Rozière has invented a soap that will clean those hats and a good many other things besides."

When he had taken his seat Dodichet exclaimed,—

"First of all, before I tell you what brought me here, let me have a whiff or two of your clay. I'm dying for a smoke.

"My clay?"

"Yes, your pipe, if you like that better."

"But I haven't a pipe."

"You haven't a pipe? you surprise me! It's so much cheaper than cigars. Well, then, give me a cigar; and let it be a dry one."

"I have no more cigars than I have a pipe."

"The devil you haven't! It seems I've taken you napping; in that case, pass me your tobacco pouch and I'll make myself a cigarette."

"I'm awfully sorry, my dear Dodichet, to be obliged to refuse you again, but I haven't a scrap of tobacco here."

"No tobacco! you haven't any tobacco! Well, that is a rum go! What do you smoke—the straw out of your mattress? For of course you must smoke something."

"And why so? As it happens I don't smoke at all; I have neither the time for it nor the desire —and, frankly, I don't see the necessity of so doing."

"You don't smoke? at your age? you must get awfully bored."

"That's where you mistake. I am never bored, for I am always at work. Why do so many men

smoke? Why, because they do nothing and time hangs on their hands and seems deathly long; so these people smoke and imagine they are doing something, have an occupation. A poor occupation indeed! which only serves to encourage idleness!"

"Oh, come now, Lucien, you bore me with your reflection on smokers!"

"My dear fellow, it wasn't necessary for you to tell me I was very unlucky not to smoke, I answered and that was all; I will add, however, that I think those men unfortunate who are incessantly smoking, who always have a pipe or a cigar in their mouths. In the first place, they smell very bad; in the second, they injure their lungs and then they spend a good deal of money — it seems nothing because it is spent a trifle at a time, but the most trifling sum repeatedly disbursed comes to a good round sum at the end of the year. It is among workmen that this mania for smoking is the most fatal, and it has impoverished many households."

"If you think that you are likely to correct smokers with your preaching, you are devilishly deceived."

"Oh, I don't pretend to correct or convince anyone, I'm merely stating my opinion — opinions are free!"

"Besides, look you, Lucien, when once one has got into the habit of smoking, one cannot give it up!"

"I beg your pardon, my dear fellow! one can give up any habit if one has only a strong enough will; if it were otherwise I should have to believe that men are but maniacs, machines, automatons, who are obliged always to make the same gestures; and, really, it would make me sorry for humanity. I have not said anything as to the fires and all the accidents caused by the carelessness of smokers. Why, Mademoiselle Juliette Mirotaine has a friend whose gown was set afire on the boulevard by a match which some smoker had thrown down without taking the trouble of stepping on it."

"I always step on them myself. But let's say no more about it. Come now, haven't you a scrap of tobacco in your pouch?"

"I haven't even a pouch. What the devil do you think I should do with one?"

"He hasn't even a pouch! Hear him, ye gods! nor launch your thunders forth! Well, when I leave here I'm going to see some ladies — do you hear? And I'm quite sure they'll have some tobacco."

"I don't doubt it — there are a good many ladies who smoke now."

"Yes, my dear fellow, you may shrug your shoulders as much as you will — the fair sex is in favor of tobacco."

"There are different categories."

"Well, we'll drop that — I am going to be brief. My dear fellow I've just been rendering you an eminent service."

"You? How is that?"

"I've just this moment come from M. Mirotaine's, where I've dined."

"By Jove! you make me shudder!"

"Rejoice, on the contrary! I saw the dealer in toilet articles, and I told her that I had a very rich friend to marry and that he did not require a dowry."

"I begged you not to do anything of the kind."

"Yes, but I didn't listen to you, and I was quite right not to do so, for everything went off as well as possible."

"And whom did you present as the would-be husband?"

"Some one who could refuse me nothing, who was willing to play any rôle that I wished — because I possessed a certain secret. Ha, ha, ha! that poor chap Miflorès-Seringat; or Seringat-Miflorès — that was indeed a pigeon that Providence sent to me to pluck just at the right moment."

"Come, make an end of it, what took place at M. Mirotaine's?"

"We dined fairly well, save that the vin ordinaire was pretty thin and the champagne more like 'Rogé's' purgative lemonade than wine, and that the vanilla cream was flavored with camphor instead of sugar. My false count did not say a word, he confined himself to eating; but as I had forewarned them that he wished to study and observe the young lady before making his proposal, everything

was going along very nicely indeed; but after dinner, while they were picking up the radishes and gherkins which that miserly Mirotaine had hidden in his pockets, along came Dubotté with his wife. A pretty little fair woman, by Jove! And if Dubotté did not find an old acquaintance in my false count, and say to him, 'Good-day, M. Seringat, and how is your wife?' You can imagine the stage effect of the situation. Papa Mirotaine was furious; the dealer in toilet articles was confused, the guests were looking at each other in astonishment, and my pretended aspirant for matrimonial honors took a very hasty leave, consigning to his infernal majesty the one who had inquired about his wife. In the midst of all this disorder, I was hard put to it to refrain from laughing. M. Mirotaine questioned me rather angrily, but I took a higher tone than he; I declared that Miflorès had played me a trick, deceived me, and that I was going in search of him to call him out. I left, and here I am. Well, what do you say to that?"

"I say you were wrong to play such a farce, and I fear it has done me more harm than good."

"Why, no, on the contrary, the old miser, disgusted with suitors whom he does not know, will receive no more of them and will decide to give you his daughter."

"I have no hope that events will transpire as you suggest."

"You are ungrateful. If one tries to oblige

people, this is how they recompense one; and you can't even give me a bit of tobacco."

"My dear Dodichet, you wished to be of service to me, no doubt, and I thank you for it; but, I repeat to you, I am not at all sure as to the results of your unpleasant joke."

"If you smoked you wouldn't be so frightened. Good-by, you virtuous, steady fellow, indefatigable worker; good-by, extraordinary man, who does not smoke. You are out of place in this century."

"That is possible, but I firmly believe a century will come when the French, returned to their old gallant ways and nice personal habits, will wonder how their ancestors could have smoked so much."

"Good-by, I must fly now in search of my treasury—he is indispensably necessary to me just now, for the waters are at a very low ebb indeed, and I want to buy a dazzling costume in which to make my début in the part of 'Joconde.'"

"At the Opéra Comique?"

"No, at Quimper-Corentin."

Lucien settled down again to the work of putting his pins in their boxes, reflecting on all that Dodichet had made known to him, and he said to himself, "It will be prudent of me to allow several days to pass before presenting myself at M. Mirotaine's; he must be very angry at having been taken in like that; I'll give his anger time to cool, and let him forget the events of this day, that he may not guess that I know anything about it."

But during the week
went to the
dinner to young
ing the mea
about that
ing a suitor
in the hope of
affairs. Young Cale
people who have
had not failed to let
had learned at Dubotte's
told her husband; the
his daughter, exclaim
"You were
these scound
and it was
this scene
able at the
shall treat
Juliett

fashion that has made me ill. You are bold indeed to dare to face me again."

Lucien quite overwhelmed, stammered,—

"Why, monsieur, what have I done? — for you to treat me thus?"

"What have you done? you may pretend to be ignorant of it, but I am not to be deceived by you, monsieur! And the dinner they forced me to give them, a dinner of eleven covers — three courses! my old bordeaux, and for an Italian count who was nothing but an apothecary and whom that Dodichet put forward as a millionnaire in search of a wife — and he was only from Pontoise — and the coffee and liqueurs! your friend Dodichet took brandy three times. Do you deny that he is your friend, and that he thought of this unworthy comedy in the hope of helping your love affair with my daughter?"

"If Dodichet did that to render me a service I swear to you, upon my honor, monsieur, that he did it against my wishes, and that I had, on the contrary, forbidden him to allow himself to take the slightest liberties with you."

"Tell that to others, monsieur, tell that to others! You confess that this Dodichet is one of your friends, that is quite sufficient for me to say that you shall not put your foot in my house again."

"Why, monsieur, my intentions are honorable, you know that, and my business in pins doesn't go badly; I shall be able, I hope, to materially increase it."

"Yes, yes! You may get it extolled and praised by your good friends, but I shan't be taken in by you — be off with you, and you need not think of coming to my house again, for you won't be received."

M. Mirotaine pushed the young man on to the landing and violently shut the door on him. Then Lucien departed, muttering, "I shall never more see Juliette, nor shall I be able to talk to her again! Ah, Dodichet, what a confoundedly bad turn you have done me."

On leaving Lucien's, Dodichet first of all bought some tobacco, then he went on to Mademoiselle Boulotte's, where he was to meet Rosa, for these damsels had been instructed as to the farce that was to be played at M. Mirotaine's, and as they were extremely anxious to learn how it turned out, Dodichet had promised to meet them and tell them all about it that same evening.

The two dancers were smoking and drinking grog, and Boulotte's room, although somewhat larger than that of Lucien, was so filled with smoke that one could hardly see across it, which did not prevent Dodichet from uttering a shout in joyous admiration of the picture which met his gaze,—

"Bravo! bravo! this is something like life. I've just left a man who is not a man — he does not smoke; but here, on the contrary, I find women who can smoke like troopers — that suits me."

"Why, it's Dodichet! How do, Dodichet!"

"Good-day, young caperers, have you any cigarette papers?"

"What a question, we would rather go without bread."

"You are right, my question was out of place; your education is perfected. Give me some of your papers. What are you drinking there?"

"Some grog — common brandy grog."

"I'll accept several glasses of it. Rosa, be kind enough to mix it for me, while Boulotte, who has a sconce for making cigarettes, goes and prepares me several. Mesdemoiselles, I am thirsty for smoke."

"Well, it seems to me you have only to open your mouth, there's plenty of it here."

"You don't understand me, my young Andalusian, I meant to say that I need to smoke myself, and I've just come from the place of a man who doesn't smoke."

"Good heavens! where does he come from, that kind of a bird."

"He doesn't come, he always stays at home — he's in love. He thinks of his sweetheart, and [illegible] to him in the place of a pipe."

"What sort of a girl is his sweetheart?"

"I don't know, I didn't ask him."

"What's that about this betrothal scene at [illegible] mariage à la Putiphar?"

"[illegible] only this even-

ing one of my friends, Phœbus Dubotté — I've nicknamed him Phœbus because he is fair and pretentious — Phœbus arrived with his wife. He found that he knew the individual whom I had introduced as an Italian count."

"The one who lends you money because you know a secret which concerns him, and before whom we must not speak of Pontoise?"

"Exactly, Boulotte, you have as good a memory as a creditor. Why, Phœbus spoke of Pontoise in calling my Miflorès by his right name. So you may judge of the scene produced by this recognition — pass me a cigarette. The Mirotaines were furious — Putiphar would have liked to see me flogged. My false count escaped, and I followed him, vowing that I would make my sword acquainted with his anatomy. The denouement of our little comedy was cut rather short; but it had to end, and I was beginning to have had enough of the Mirotaine's society. They had, however, some very good types there. One was M. Brid'oison, who was lost in admiration of his son, whom he urged to gymnastic efforts to everybody's discomfort; his wife chewed her hair, and a sister of the host was weeping all over the place because she had been hit in the eye with a pickled onion."

"And the dinner, was it good?"

"A skinflint's dinner — bad wine, no truffles, cream flavored with camphor."

"With camphor?"

"Yes, in place of sugar; I don't advise you to make use of it, for it does not replace the sugar advantageously. Finally, the trick is done, and I've just left Lucien after telling him how I had served his love affairs."

"He thanked you heartily, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it, he scolded me, and then preached me a sermon on tobacco! Pass me a cigarette. Now I must rejoin my Miflorès, for I need money. I've seen a dramatic agent and he tells me they are expecting me at Quimper-Corentin, where they need a young first tenor. I am young — I have a pleasing personal appearance, and a sufficiently good voice. I give the chest 'sol.'"

"The 'sol'? Why that is not an 'ut,' that isn't."

"I know perfectly well, Mademoiselle Rosa, that a 'sol' is not an 'ut,' or rather a 'do,' to speak more elegantly; but a very high chest 'sol' is quite pretty, too; and, besides, if the public is not pleased I shall say to it, 'Oh, you be hanged,' and that will be satisfactory."

"And what part shall you come out in?"

"In that of Joconde. I'm to sing,—

Long I've wandered through the world,

as if that was the only thing I'd been doing."

"Do they play comic operas then at Quimper-Corentin?"

"Why, my dear Rosa, where do you come from? Don't you know that since the theatres have had their freedom they play all sorts of things, and no matter where. I've seen 'Tartuffe' represented in a barn, and the 'Battle of Pultowa' in an alcove; the Russians hiding behind a bedside table, and the Swedish carrying a wash basin at the point of the bayonet. So there is nothing surprising in their playing opera comique at Quimper. There is only one thing that hinders me; the agent has informed me that the management does not furnish the costumes; and, as I don't care to play Joconde in a sack-coat or a frock-coat, I must buy a costume, and I want it to be dazzling, glistening. That is what I need money for, and what I must find Miflorès for."

"Why, I thought you were heir to some old aunt?"

"Yes, I have an inheritance in perspective — it is the last. But the old aunt does not show herself at all obliging — she doesn't die. That's why Miflorès is necessary to me."

"But by what charm do you manage to get that man to lend you money so often?"

"Ah, that is my secret."

"Oh, Dodichet, you'll tell us your secret, won't you? You'll confide it to us?"

"Mesdemoiselles — I'll tell it to you when I have no further need of borrowing from Miflorès, when I have inherited my aunt's property."

"I don't know what you would have done! but you must acknowledge that I could not have foreseen this meeting. Look you, my dear Seringat, you're not angry with me, are you?"

"Don't call me Seringat — I don't wish to be called so again."

"That is correct, you are Miflorès. That is understood — my dear fellow, I shall again be obliged to dip into your purse. I am going to make my first appearance on the stage at Quimper-Corentin, and in Joconde — nothing less than that! But I need a costume for the part, a rich and elegant costume; you know, Joconde is the friend of Count Robert."

"No, I don't know that play."

"I am going to answer you like M. Prudhomme in the 'Famille improvisée'; you are wrong not to know it, if you had the opportunity of doing so. How much do I owe you now?"

"Two thousand francs, that I have lent you in four parts."

"That's correct — five hundred francs each time; oh, well, today lend me a thousand francs at one go. I shall then owe you three thousand francs; but my old aunt can't last much longer; besides, I am going to have a great success on the stage, and tenors are now paid an outrageous price. I can easily repay a thousand crowns when I shall earn fifty thousand francs a year."

M. Seringat took from the pocket of his note-

book a bill for a thousand francs, which he gave to Dodichet saying,—

"That's for your secrecy."

"Thank you, my dear fellow; you have ugly moments, but very pretty quarters of an hour. Will you come and witness my début at Quimper!"

"No, I don't wish to leave Paris; one is much safer lost in a crowd. Besides, I have discovered a little hotel at the back of a court, at the back of the Rue Jacques, and I'm going to take refuge there."

"Very good! but as I must be able to find you, if it's only to return what I owe you, I'll go with you as far as the little hotel at the back of a court —which must be very difficult to get at, for ordinarily the courts are behind the hotel. Then I shall say good-by to you, and be off to Brittany to gather laurels and yellow boys."

A cab was in waiting in front of the mysterious gentleman's lodging; they loaded it with baggage. Dodichet took his place inside with Seringat, and did not leave the latter until he had seen him installed in an old house in the Rue Saint-Jacques, which looked as much like a hotel as Suresnes wine is like chambertin.

Dodichet's first care was to buy some tobacco, pipes, cigars, and papers for cigarettes. His provisions laid in, he busied himself with the costume in which he was to appear as Joconde. He spent three hundred francs, but had a dazzling costume

which was almost new. When he got home he tried it on and thought so well of it he sent his porter to find Boulotte, that she might see him as Joconde.

Mademoiselle Boulotte came and uttered a cry of admiration when she saw Dodichet, who had on tight breeches of white silk slashed with violet velvet, a velvet tunic of the same color, a lace ruff, a velvet cap in which was stuck a handsome white feather, a gilt belt, and yellow funnel-shaped boots. She insisted that Dodichet should go down with her as he was, to get a chop; but the latter dared not risk himself in a café in such a costume, since it was not carnival time. All that he could do was to send and order a dinner at the neighboring restaurant, and to dine with his little acquaintance in Joconde's costume.

Mademoiselle Boulotte was delighted, she imagined that she was dining with a noble stranger. They laughed, they ate, they drank heartily. Dodichet sang between each dish a scrap from his part; his voice was of good compass, but had become husky from the abuse of tobacco.

"My good fellow," said Boulotte, "you must not smoke on the day of your début, nor even on the night before."

"All right! all right! I am a little hoarse this evening, but if I swallow the yolk of an egg raw, my voice will become clear as if by magic. Meanwhile, let us drink and smoke. I am not going to appear tomorrow."

They smoked and drank so much that Joconde ended by rolling under the table in his fine costume, which the next day he found to be stained, dusty and torn. Dodichet was obliged to buy another pair of silk breeches, and hastened to the railway without again putting on his stage costume.

Arrived at Quimper-Corentin, Dodichet immediately sought the manager of the play. As he had much assurance and audacity, he presented himself as if he was one of the first actors of the day; and the manager, deceived by his manner, took him for a man accustomed to success. To ensure the manager's good will, and that of his future comrades, Dodichet invited them all to dinner at the best hotel in the place. At table he begged them not to spare either bordeaux or champagne. The actors of this neighborhood were quite unused to being treated in this way, and the manager himself, quite astonished at having a tenor who was rolling in gold was persuaded that he had obtained an Ellevion or a Tamberlick.

That same evening they announced at the theatre the approaching appearance of a young tenor who had already obtained the greatest success on the first stages of Russia, Germany and Italy — for prudence' sake Dodichet did not mention France. As his name was inharmonious to the ear, and seemed rather fitted for a comedian than a virtuoso, Dodichet had himself announced as Signor Rouladini, which seemed to promise an Italian singer.

"How many rehearsals do you want?" demanded the stage manager of his new artist; and the latter answered with that self-possession that never abandoned him,—

"A single one will suffice. I know the play by heart, and at a push I could play all the parts."

However, at the rehearsal Signor Rouladini, who said he knew the whole play by heart, did not even know his part, and turned every moment to the prompter.

"I have forgotten a little of it because I know too much," said Dodichet. "But tomorrow, before the public, I shall not miss a word."

"You are still quite hoarse," said the manager; "do you want me to retard your appearance a little?"

"No, indeed, no; for I shall have the same voice later on, but on the day of my début I'll swallow the yolks of several raw eggs and my voice will be clear and clean. You need be uneasy about nothing."

The manager did not seem quite reassured; but all the actors to whom Dodichet had given the dinner declared that he must have a very pretty voice when he was not hoarse. The young prima donna advised him not to smoke until after his début, but Dodichet laughed in her face, and wagered that he would smoke on the stage while she was singing; but the manager formally objected to the new singer making any such attempt, and he warned

Rouladini that the public of the neighborhood would not put up with much nonsense.

"It's because you don't know how to take them," answered the latter, "but with me I defy them to show me any bad temper."

The day of the appearance arrived. In the morning they rehearsed again, and again Dodichet did not know his part, appealing incessantly to the prompter, a very stubborn old dancer, who declared that the new tenor was deaf. His voice was a little more mellow, thanks to the yolks of eggs; but on leaving rehearsal and to give himself courage, Dodichet drank punch and treated all his comrades except the prompter, with whom he was not pleased, and here he made a great mistake; an actor should be on as good terms with his prompter as a tenant with his porter.

In dining, Dodichet thought it necessary to take a little more, to give him courage before the public. Then he smoked, coughed, cleared his throat, tried his voice; the punch had completely destroyed the effect of the eggs; his voice was gone. Dodichet sent out for some more eggs, he swallowed several raw while he was dressing, and went on to the stage feeling horribly sick at his stomach.

The sight of the audience chamber filled with people quite daunted the debutant, he did not know where he was, nor what he was doing, and seeing in one of the orchestra seats a gentleman with whom he had played dominos the evening

"Oh, so that's how you receive me, is it?" said Dodichet; "oh, well, you are all calves' heads!" and turning his back on the public he made a very vulgar gesture and escaped into the wings. But the gesture he had permitted himself and the words he had uttered had completely aroused the ire of the audience; they jumped into the midst of the musicians; they clambered on to the stage, and ran towards the scenery, saying,—

"We will teach him to fail in respect to the public, this gentleman; it is not hisses, but a good drubbing with a cane that Signor Rouladini needs."

And the prompter rubbed his hands in his den.

The manager tried in vain to calm the public, they would not listen to him. But Dodichet's comrades, seeing that the affair was becoming serious, hastened to make him leave the theatre by a secret entrance; they threw on his shoulders a gendarme's cloak, they put on his head a fireman's helmet and they said to him,—

"You must leave the town at once. Don't go back to your hotel, you will not be safe there. Go to the railway station and get away — the Bretons will not take a joke, and you played your part very badly."

Quite out of his wits at what had happened to him, Dodichet found himself in the street without quite knowing how. Fortunately for him he always wore his purse in his belt, in order that he might constantly have the means of purchasing liquid

refreshments; he, therefore, quickly made up his mind. Wrapping himself in the mantle they had thrown around him, and putting the fireman's helmet firmly on his head, he directed his steps towards the station, saying to himself, "These provincials are not capable of appreciating me, I'll go back to Paris, I've still two hundred francs in my pocket and with that I can await events."

Dodichet threw himself into a third-class carriage, where there were already three women. His singular costume frightened them, they wanted to change their places, but Dodichet reassured them by telling them he was coming from a masquerade ball and that it was to win a bet that he had kept his disguise. However, at the first station he bought other clothes, not daring to return to Paris attired as Joconde, with a gendarme's cloak and a fireman's hat in addition to the original costume.

These changes of attire cost money, and on arriving in Paris Dodichet had barely a hundred francs of the thousand that M. Seringat had lent him. But on the very day of his arrival he received a letter from Troyes, and that letter was bordered with black.

"My poor aunt is dead!" he said to himself. "But faith! I shan't be such a hypocrite as to weep for her. My inheritance just comes in time. I shall pay Seringat, I shall buy a shawl for Boulotte and I shall pass golden days of champagne and truffles; for the good aunt was rich. She can't have left me less than a hundred thousand francs."

Dodichet opened the letter, which, in fact, announced his aunt's death, and that she had left her fortune to a distant cousin, since she was unwilling that it should revert to her scapegrace of a nephew, who had already made such a bad use of that which his other relations had left him.

Dodichet had not expected to be disinherited; he angrily crushed in his hands the lawyer's letter which brought him this news and, for the first time, his reflections were not rose-colored.

CHAPTER XI

An Ugly Brother-in-Law

Since he had broken with Nathalie, vainly had Adhémar sought amusement and distraction; he could find them nowhere. When he loves truly, it is with great difficulty that a lover refrains from seeking her whose presence is so delightful to him; he tries in vain to be brave, and says to himself that a lost love can be replaced by another; but he cannot tear away so easily from the depths of his heart the beloved image; he feels a void, experiences a loneliness, which follows him from place to place, and he prefers the memory of the regretted past to all the pleasures that are offered to him in the present.

Adhémar was unhappy, and he was also displeased with himself; however, he tried to prove that he had been right to break the connection which had had so much charm for him. He said to himself,—

"I loved her, I loved her sincerely; but she did not love me, since she has deceived me. That pipe case did not belong to a woman, so she must have admitted male visitors without telling me. And the moment one's mistress has this sort of

secret, one knows what it means very well indeed. And I had detected the smell of tobacco on a previous occasion, so the smoker goes to see her often. Ah, Nathalie! you were the woman of my dreams! I should have been so happy had you loved me. But no, women cannot be faithful; and why should she be different to others?"

On a certain day, as the man of letters was walking sadly along and meditating thus, whom should he meet face to face but Lucien, who was also in the dismals.

"Why, Lucien!"

"Adhémar!"

"And where are you off to, looking so melancholy, my dear Lucien?"

"I was going—faith, I don't know where I was going. I was walking at hazard, I am so unhappy —so out of sorts."

"Are you indeed! Come, tell me your troubles, my poor Lucien. I am not very cheerful myself, either. Well, let us share our griefs, we shall perhaps find a little consolation in so doing. Is it about your inventions? isn't your little business successful?"

"Pardon me, that is going very well indeed, on the contrary, and that is exactly the reason why you see me so distressed."

"I don't understand you."

"My little business was going well, and I had every reason to hope that, at last, they would give

me Juliette's hand; well, instead of that, M. Mirotaine showed me to his door and forbade me ever to return — and all that because Dodichet got the unlucky idea of trying to help my love affairs by presenting to the Mirotaines a pretended Italian count, a millionnaire, who was going to demand Juliette's hand. They invited him to dinner, and went to great expense to entertain him. Then arrived Dubotté, who discovered the fraud. M. Mirotaine saw that he was being hoaxed, and he is persuaded that I was acting in conjunction with Dodichet, hence his anger against me and the order he gave me to stay away from his house."

"That devil of a Dodichet! I remember, however, that you strictly forbade him to play the slightest joke on M. Mirotaine."

"He thought he was doing me a service, so I can't bear him any grudge. For all that he was the cause of my being put out."

"The old miser's anger will wear itself out—if you are successful in your undertakings. His daughter will make him listen to reason."

"But, in the mean time, I can't see her, nor come to an understanding with her. When I was allowed to go there we found a way to exchange a few words on the sly, but now that I can't see Juliette how can I put her in possession of facts concerning myself. But to be quite unable to see, even for a single moment, the woman one loves, why, Adhémar, it is nothing short of torture."

"It is, as you say."

"Can't you see her you love, either?"

"You mean she whom I loved, but who did not love me — she has deceived me, which comes to the same thing. Then I ceased to visit her, but I feel that I love her still."

"Are you quite sure she deceived you?"

"Sure! as much so as a man can be who sees that a woman is keeping secrets from him. Come, Lucien, if you were to learn that your Juliette received visitors of whom she breathed not a word to you, would you not think that she had other love affairs? That is, supposing she was mistress of her own actions?"

"If Juliette were her own mistress, if she lived in the most modest little room, if any one should say to me, 'She receives other men beside you,' I would not suspect her for an instant."

"By Jove! what a trustful fellow you are. And if you had a proof that she received men secretly?"

"Well, then, I should say to myself, 'No doubt she has some reason for hiding these visits from me — but she has not the slightest reason for telling me, swearing to me, that she loves me, if she doesn't. When I go to see her, does she not always receive me with the sweetest smile? Can I not read in her eyes all the pleasure that my presence causes her? Only if she should cease to be the same to me, should I fear she no longer loved me."

"That's all very well; you have a happy disposition, you are not jealous."

"Oh, not at all!"

"Tell me, do you know Madame Dermont? She is, I think, a friend of Mademoiselle Juliette."

"Madame Dermont? Yes. I have met her several times at Juliette's when M. Mirotaine still allowed me to talk with his daughter. A very agreeable woman indeed. She is Juliette's best friend. They tell each other their sorrows and their joys, they hide nothing from each other. She is well aware that Juliette loves me, and if she could serve us in our love affair she would like nothing better. But it is out of her power to do so. She has had a good deal of trouble also."

"She — Nathalie? I mean to say, Madame Dermont — what trouble has she? She never spoke to me of it."

"Do you know her, then, this lady?"

"Yes — a little. I go to her house sometimes — but these troubles, what are they? Lucien, my dear fellow, I beg of you, tell me all you know."

"Why, I know it through Juliette, to whom, as I told you just now, this lady confides all her troubles."

"But what are these troubles? — for God's sake, come to the point."

Lucien smiled as he looked at Adhémar, and answered,—

"How very much interested you are in every-

thing that concerns this young lady — Is it because, by any chance? — "

"Yes, yes, I love her, I adore her, I am mad about her — but these troubles? please, my dear fellow, tell me all that you know — "

" Madame Dermont is a widow, as you know, but her husband had a brother — a very bad fellow, by the way — who will do nothing but get tipsy, gamble, and frequent the worst places. When M. Dermont died, Alexandre, that's the brother's name, Alexandre was furious to see that he inherited nothing, that everything passed into the young widow's hands, the whole fortune — modest enough, for the matter of that — which the defunct had left. He went to his sister-in-law and made a scene, even went so far as to threaten her; but the young woman has some strength of mind, some character, and she showed her brother-in-law the door. Alexandre then saw that he had gone the wrong way about it and that he could obtain nothing from Madame Dermont with threats; he returned to her house, not threatening this time, but weeping and groaning. The young woman did not drive him away, she gave him five hundred francs and advised him to become a soldier; the only career in which he could hope to succeed. Alexandre promised to follow her advice; but in a few months he returned saying that he was dying of hunger, that he had had nothing to eat since the day before, and he poisoned the atmosphere with brandy and tobacco! "

"And tobacco! he smokes! Ah, I understand now. Poor woman; but why did she not tell me all this?"

"Why not? Because it is painful to say that a man with whom one is connected, who bears the same name, for Alexandre is also named Dermont —Well, she doesn't like to confess that a worthless fellow, a scamp, is her brother, and that he has at least the right to call her sister."

"And this wretch came back again to torment Nathalie?"

"Good God! she doesn't know how to get rid of him! and it's hard to be always giving money when it only serves to encourage vice and debauchery."

"Ah, I'll get rid of him, this ugly brother-in-law! Dear Nathalie! But why didn't she confide in me. No matter, I am a wretch, I am unworthy of being loved by so good, so sweet a woman —if — Lucien, give me your hand. My dear fellow, if you did but know what a good turn you have done me — you have restored me to life — to happiness, to love, to her in fact! Good-by, Lucien, good-by. I shall run, I shall fly to ask her to pardon me. Oh, she will forgive me, will she not?"

And without awaiting Lucien's answer, Adhémar set off walking precipitately to Madame Dermont's; but when he approached her dwelling, when he saw the house in which she lived he slackened his pace; he asked himself how he would be

received by her whom he had left in so rude a fashion after having unjustly suspected her. When he reached the door he stopped, he dared not enter and racked his head for a pretext, a motive for presenting himself.

For some minutes he stood irresolutely before the gateway, when he was suddenly pushed aside by an individual who went into the house, saying to him in a coarse tone,—

"Get out of the way there — don't you see that you're stopping up the gateway?"

The person who addressed these words to him was a man of thirty, very negligently dressed, and whose hat seemed to have received several dents. This man, whose face was wrinkled and pimpled from drink before its time, had a common, insolent appearance, smelled strongly of tobacco, and seemed to be half tipsy already.

"Monsieur, where are you going?" cried the porter, to the individual who had entered the vestibule and was going towards the staircase, while Adhémar, who had been on the point of taking him to task for the rude manner in which he had pushed him, stopped to hear his answer.

"Where am I going? Why, hang it all, you know very well; it isn't the first time. I am going to see my sister — Madame Dermont."

"Madame Dermont is out, monsieur."

"You always tell me the same thing, and you know very well I shall go up, just the same."

"Monsieur, I am expressly forbidden to allow you to go up—and this time you shan't go up."

"I shan't go up? Have you done, you old snoozer? Look you here! Madame Dermont doesn't want to receive me, but I am Alexandre Dermont, her husband's brother, and she has no right to refuse me admission, so I shall go up, all the same, and you be hanged, porter! And my sister-in-law will be obliged to receive me, because — because I —"

M. Alexandre did not finish this phrase because some one in front of him barred the way and forced him to recede, looking fixedly into his eyes. Then he muttered,—

"Come now, what's it got to do with you — let me pass, do you hear!"

"I will show you what it has to do with me, M. Alexandre Dermont."

"I don't know you — let me go up —"

"You will not go up; you will not go to your — sister-in-law, who is perfectly right to refuse to admit a wretch, a scoundrel of your kind."

"What are you saying? What is that? what are you meddling for?"

"I tell you that you are a low rascal, that you shan't go to Madame Dermont's to get money from her, which you spend in orgies and debauchery! Aren't you ashamed to conduct yourself in such a way? — and do you think that Madame Dermont's modest fortune will continually serve

to gratify your low tastes? No, monsieur, you need expect nothing more. I forbid you — do you hear me? — I forbid you to again present yourself at your sister-in-law's."

"And by what right, if you please?"

"By the right that all good men are born to — the right to defend a woman who is oppressed, who is threatened, who is robbed —"

"Oh, you're a nuisance! I'm going up."

And M. Alexandre, making a half turn, tried to gain the staircase, but Adhémar caught him, seized him by the throat, and pressed him against the wall, saying,—

"If you again attempt to go up those stairs, I'll break your head against this wall."

"Monsieur, you are strangling me!"

"Do you understand me?"

"Yes — but let me go."

"Will you swear to come no more to Madame Dermont's?"

"Yes — I swear — but you wrong me. I left a pipe case at my sister's — I was going to look for it."

"It wasn't for such a miserable trifle as that, that you came; it was to ask the lady for money again, thief that you are."

"Monsieur, you insult me!"

"Oh, you think I insult you? well, if you have the smallest spark of courage, come, and I will give you satisfaction. There's an armorer's near

here, we'll go and get some pistols, and take a cab. Come along."

"Me fight — not if I know it! thank you! let me go, I've had enough of it, and I swear never to come back."

"Go, then; but if you fail to keep this vow, I swear to you I won't fail you!"

M. Alexandre listened no further, but hurried off as though he feared pursuit. Then the porter, who had armed himself with his broom to help Adhémar if it had been necessary, cried,—

"Oh, monsieur, how lucky that you were here to drive away that wicked scapegrace. Me, he would not listen to — but you! Oh, you shook him so soundly that I'll answer for it he won't show himself here again. You have rendered Madame Dermont a famous service."

"And — has the lady really gone out?"

"No, monsieur, no, she has been out scarcely at all this long time past — but that was my orders for that ruffian at all times. Oh, you can go up — you will be well received, you will."

Adhémar mounted the staircase, then he stopped in front of Nathalie's door; he was deeply moved and said, "She hardly ever goes out, the porter said. Has she been ill? and was I the cause of it? Cursed jealousy! How will she receive me? No matter, I wish to see her, and to die at her feet if she will not forgive me."

Tremblingly he rang the bell; the maid opened

to him, and uttered an exclamation of joy when she saw him, for servants can always guess their mistress' secret thoughts, and the latter knew very well that Adhémar's return would bring back joy and happiness into the house, which had been very gloomy and dull ever since he had ceased to visit it.

"Ask Madame Dermont if she is willing to receive me," murmured Adhémar.

The servant ran joyfully to her mistress and returned almost immediately to say he might come in. Adhémar did not allow her to repeat her words. He found Nathalie with her embroidery in her hand, but she was not working. One glance sufficed to show him that she was pale, changed; that an expression of sadness was imprinted on her features. Adhémar could no longer contain himself, he threw himself on his knees at her feet, he took her hands and pressed them in his own, exclaiming,—

"Pray forgive me; if you could but know how I have reproached myself! But I swear it shall not occur again, for I am entirely cured now. Oh, I have been so unhappy and miserable while away from you."

"And I, monsieur, do you suppose I did not suffer? why did you not come back sooner? what prevented you?"

"Why it was because — I don't know why — Come, Nathalie, I can't lie to you — today I met

Lucien, and I learned from him that you had a brother-in-law who smoked."

"And then you understood that I had no other love affair. Hothead! if you had not gone so quickly, so suddenly, I should have told you all — disclosed everything — but when jealousy seizes hold of you there is no way of making you listen to reason."

"Hereafter, my confidence in you will be complete. You love me and you forgive me again, do you not?"

"Yes, but this is the last time, for such scenes try me too much."

At this moment they heard the servant shrieking with laughter in the kitchen. Nathalie rang the bell and inquired of her as to the cause of this fit of merriment.

"Oh, madame, hasn't monsieur told you what he has done to your rascal of a brother-in-law? The porter has just told me. Monsieur drove him out of the house, and took him by the throat and threatened to break his head if he ever dared to come near you."

"Is that true, Adhémar?"

"Of course — was I wrong?"

"Oh, quite otherwise; you have rendered me a great service. It seems that I am destined to be saved from all kinds of dangers by you! You see, monsieur, you were quite wrong to abandon me."

As his only answer Adhémar covered her hand with kisses, and the maid went back to her kitchen, exclaiming,—

"Oh, what good luck! that man and his tobacco will never come here again."

CHAPTER XII

A Box in the Pit

Eléonore, after the evening on which M. Callé had played bezique with her up to midnight, said tenderly to her husband,—

"Do you not know, monsieur, that it is extremely wrong of you to leave me to thus pass the evening quite alone with a young man — it shows a good deal of indifference to your wife — and, in fact, if I did not love you I might wish to avenge myself for your frequent absences. You expose me to having false declarations of love made to me."

"My dearest, you don't look at those things from the right point of view," answered handsome Philémon, caressing his mutton-chop whiskers, which threatened to overrun his cheeks. "Come now, did Callé make you a declaration?"

"Oh, no!"

"You see it is all right, then. Devil take it! I know whom I'm leaving you with; this young man is as chaste as Voltaire's 'Candide.' Do you know Voltaire's 'Candide?'"

"No, my dear."

"I must get you to read it, for you know too

little about literature, and I should like to instruct you in everything. I don't like people to say of my wife, 'She is a simpleton.' You understand, I don't want people to say that, and you must conduct yourself accordingly."

"I'll try, my dear."

"To come back to Callé; he's one of those who are rather simple; he dare not look a woman in the face, and scarcely dares to speak to her. So you see, I can leave him with you without fear. If ever he should fall in love with any lady it will be because she has made the first advances."

"Do you think so, my dear?"

"I am sure of it; he would never dare to declare himself if he wasn't helped a little. But then, my darling, since I am so assured of your virtue and the love you bear me, I am quite easy on that score. I trust you to Callé as to the guardian of a seraglio. Do you know what the guardian of a seraglio in Turkey is?"

"No, my dear."

"Well, it is an eunuch."

"And what is an eunuch?"

"Why, don't you know? I will tell you one of these evenings — when it rains. Really, I have a good many things to teach you."

Some days later Philémon said in the morning to his wife,—

"My dear, you are going to have a great pleasure. I know you like the play, and above all the

Theatre du Gymnase; well, I've a box for you for this evening."

"What a delightful treat — the Gymnase, too. You've a box! now that was nice of you. What time shall we start, my dear? so I may be ready, and not keep you waiting."

"Oh, the play doesn't begin till half-past seven, be ready at a quarter past, that will be soon enough; no one would call for you before that time."

"What! call for me! Am I not going with you?"

"No, no, I shall go later on and join you, because I'm obliged to go this evening to a party at my chief's. You understand! I can't fail them. When one wants to get on one must try to stand well with those who are above him."

"But, then, if you knew you were going to a party, why did you order a box for this evening?"

"Why did I? Well, if I amuse myself on one side, should not you do so on the other?"

"But you always used to take me with you to the parties at your chief's."

"Oh, yes, on evenings when there was dancing — or music — but today it will be a —a serious party; they will talk politics, they will be interested in conversing about the future obligations of a new oriental railway, and, as you can imagine, it would bore women fearfully to have to listen to all that. That is why there will be no women at the party."

"And with whom do you intend that I should go to the play?"

"Oh, don't be uneasy about that, I've let Caillé know; I saw him yesterday, and said to him, 'Will you come to-morrow evening and take my place at the theatre?' He jumped at my proposal with delight; he's extremely fond of the theatre."

"But you will abuse this young man's kindness."

"You mean that I shall give him a great deal of pleasure; the poor fellow has never known what it was to have a mistress of the right kind! He is quite proud at the thought of escorting you; he says to himself, 'People will think I have made a conquest of this fair lady.'"

"And you are quite willing that people shall think I am this young man's mistress?"

"Why no, no one will believe it! I tell you that it is he who will imagine they think so. One has to be careful to dot all one's i's to make you understand anything."

"There is one thing that I understand very well, monsieur, and that is that you are now doing your best to prevent my going with you. And although you think me very simple, I beg you to believe that I perceive your object perfectly."

"Oh, these women, these women — they take everything the wrong way. I've done the best I can to be agreeable, I've got you a box for the play — a charming play too, so they say; I can't take you with me this evening, it's a political party —

very good! I don't wish that you should sit

moping alone beside the fire — and instead of thanking me for what I have done, you overwhelm me with reproaches and say all manner of absurd things. Be quite easy, when I order a box for you again you will know it."

M. Dubotté went out in a very bad temper. Madame Dubotté said nothing more, but she probably thought a great deal. In the evening she made a very careful and elaborate toilet. Young Callé arrived very promptly at the appointed hour; he was attired, curled, and scented as if he were going to a wedding. Philémon gave him the ticket, saying,—

"Here is your box — I shall join you later on, if it is possible to tear myself away from my chief's in time to do so. See that my wife amuses herself — which is not easy, for she isn't always in a good temper. If you render her amiable you will work a miracle."

Young Callé bowed and left the house with Eléonore, who was getting used to hanging on his arm. The young man wished to take a carriage, but the lady refused, because the Gymnase theatre was at no very great distance from her house. On the way Callé began several speeches as to the pleasure he experienced in finding himself with so charming a lady; but as he could not manage to finish any of them, Eléonore came to his aid every time by saying, "You are very kind," and there the sentence remained.

When they reached the theatre, Callé looked at the box and said,—

"It is a pit box."

"A pit box? I don't know what that is; is it very high?"

"On the contrary, it is down below, around the pit."

When they opened the box, Eléonore hesitated at going in, and exclaimed,—

"Good heavens! how dark it is in there! What, is that our box?"

"Why, yes, madame," answered the box-keeper, "and you will see very well, it is almost fronting the stage."

"Oh, how strange it is. Yes, that's true, we can see the stage very well—but we can't be seen—it is hardly worth while to have made a toilet; but I shall get used to it, perhaps. M. Callé, do you like these boxes?"

"Madame, I am always pleased when I have the privilege—"

"You are very kind."

Eléonore placed herself in the front of the box; Callé seated himself modestly behind madame. When the young woman had looked into the house for a moment—she was able to see but a very small part of it—she turned towards her squire, who looked at her, smiled, and said nothing.

"M. Callé, you can see nothing where you are; place yourself in front, beside me."

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"Oh, madame, you are very kind, but I am very well here—in front I should be in the way of your crinoline."

"Not at all."

"I can see the stage very well."

"But you can't see the house at all."

"That doesn't matter to me in the least—what I can see is much more agreeable to me—to look at—and when I am near you, madame—then I have no need to—I don't need to look elsewhere to—to—"

"You are very kind."

The play began. They listened to the piece, in which love-making was the chief point of interest. Eléonore seemed to be interested in this; the young man sighed continually. After the act he went out and quickly came back with bonbons and crystallized fruits, which he offered to Madame Dubotté. The latter accepted them with a sweet smile. It was again a case of saying to her escort, "You are very kind." But she contented herself with offering him a quarter of orange, crystallized, and feasted herself on the candied fruits. Women are generally very fond of bonbons; a man ought always to have his pockets full of them if he wishes to please the ladies. You can vary this form of treat, however, by offering truffles cooked in champagne, then your triumph will be still more complete.

They played the after-piece; sometimes, that he

" I am very sensible of the fact. Why, M. Callé, where are you looking now — my opera-glass isn't there! oh, wait! I can feel it with my foot."

Callé decided very regretfully to bring his head out from beneath the seat; he held the opera-glass and presented it to the young lady with a trembling hand; the latter was also moved, so much so that in taking the opera-glass she dropped it again. This time it was on her knees. Callé had retaken his place, but now, as she turned round to speak to him, Eléonore partly leaned on him, it may have been without noticing it; ladies often commit little familiarities like that, which give great hopes to those who are the recipients of them. The young man was as red as a cherry and his eyes were still fixed elsewhere than on the stage. The act finished, and Madame Dubotté, turning towards her squire, asked him what he thought of the play. He stammered,—

" I don't know, madame, I did not understand a word of it."

" What? you were not listening, then?"

" I was listening, but I did not understand, I was so distracted by — by — Have you dropped your opera-glass again, madame?"

" Why, no, here it is, on my knees."

" Ah — that's a pity!"

" What, would you like it to be on the floor again?"

" Of course, because I should then have the

pleasure of looking for it again, and then — and then —"

Following his custom, the young man did not finish his sentence, but he heaved such a deep sigh that the young woman said to him kindly,—

"Are you in pain, M. Callé?"

"Oh, no, madame, quite the contrary."

"What are you sighing so deeply for, then?"

"It is my way of showing that I am happy."

"Ah — that's strange. You are happy, then?"

"Oh, yes, madame — I always am — when I am near you."

This time the sentence had been completed; Eléonore thanked the young man with a sweet smile, and during the last act she leaned a good deal more on the person behind her, whose knees served her as an armchair.

The play came to an end and they returned to the house slowly, very slowly; they did not seem at all in a hurry to get there. Eléonore spoke of the play; the young man answered, "Yes," and, "No," at random; but he squeezed the arm that was within his own very tenderly, which did not seem to vex the person who received that mark of esteem.

When she reached her dwelling, Madame Dubotté invited her young escort to come and see her soon and have a game of bezique while her husband was out without her, according to his usual custom. Callé swore that he would profit by this permission.

In fact, during the following week M. Callé came nearly every evening to have a game of cards with the fair Eléonore, and the latter showed no more ill-temper when her husband went out without her. She even said to him sometimes,—

"My dear, if you have business, don't trouble about me, M. Callé will come and keep me company — he plays bezique very well indeed. He never can get enough of it, he is indefatigable."

Then Dubotté was delighted; he exclaimed,—

"At last I have formed my wife! She is just where I wanted her to be. She's no longer incessantly on my heels — she leaves me entire freedom. This is just where I wanted her to get to. I've had a good deal of trouble to bring it about, but I've managed to do so. She goes to the play now with Callé without being in a bad temper, even if I do not rejoin her later."

The young woman did still more; when her husband promised to order a box for the play for her, she said to him,—

"My dear, try and get a pit box."

CHAPTER XIII

Incorrigible

Nathalie received daily visits from Adhémar, who spent with her all the time he could spare from his literary pursuits during the day, and he also passed almost every evening with her; he often communicated his plots to her, his ideas for new plays; he would read a scene to her, a chapter from a new novel; he consulted her, he listened to her opinion. If Molière consulted his servant, was it not even more natural to consult his mistress. There is, however, one difference in this respect; the servant, Laforest, was proud and happy to be consulted by his master; while among twenty mistresses you will find nineteen who would refuse to listen to you if you talked of literature to them; who would yawn were you to read but one page that you had written; or who would interrupt you at the most interesting place to say to you, "My dear, would you prefer green or blue for a gown. I think blue becomes me best — what do you think?"

Then you see that your efforts to read what would move her will be lost, you put your manuscript back in your pocket, and you resolve never

to talk with your sweetheart about anything but fashions and finery, since she takes interest in nothing but those. But, of course, there are exceptions, there are women who are willing to listen when one speaks of something besides themselves, who know how to talk about some thing other than fashions and love. Nathalie was one of these exceptions; that was why Adhémar was so happy when with her, that was why they suited each other so well.

The most perfect harmony existed between the two lovers, when one day, arriving at Madame Dermont's sooner than usual, the servant told him that her mistress was not in.

"What! she has gone out before noon to make some purchases, no doubt?"

"I don't know, monsieur; but I am quite sure that madame won't be long before she comes in; for every time she goes out like that in the morning, she always comes in before noon."

"Every time—she goes out like that?" muttered Adhémar, who already felt his heart oppressed. "Oh, Madame Dermont often goes out in the morning, then?"

"Mercy, monsieur, I didn't say that exactly—but several times lately she has."

Adhémar stopped his questions then and there. He threw himself into an armchair, saying,—

"I will wait for her; no doubt she will tell me where she has been."

And he tried to drive from his mind the evil thoughts that were already besieging it. Five minutes had barely elapsed when Nathalie came in. She seemed rather surprised to find Adhémar there; but she went to him, held out her hand to him, and smiled as usual.

"Good morning, my dear."

"Good morning, madame."

"Why, what does that madame mean? Since when have I become madame to you? is it because I was out when you came in that you call me madame?"

"Why no — it was simply a change."

"I don't like such changes as that! What is the matter with you?"

"Me? nothing! Have you been for a walk?"

"Yes — that is to say I have been making a visit."

"Ah, a visit! Perhaps it would be indiscreet to ask you whom you have been to see — so early in the morning."

"Why, it is perhaps rather indiscreet! However, as I see you are scowling, and as you probably suspect me of some treason already — "

"Why, what an idea!"

"No, you are incapable of that, are you not? Well, monsieur, I've been to see my poor friend Juliette — are you satisfied?"

"By Jove! I only asked you that by way of conversation."

"Yes, I understand — and to know where I had been."

"And you've seen your friend Juliette?"

"Of course."

"And you have been to see her quite often — for some time past?"

"Why not, if I can console her, be agreeable to her, listen to her confidences? If you have any grief, does it not ease you when a true friend comes to see you and offers you consolation."

"Oh, when I'm in trouble, I keep it to myself, I don't go and tell it to others!"

"My dear, women are not like men; when they have troubles — love troubles above all — they like to pour out their hearts in the bosom of a friend."

"Yes, women are very fond of having secrets among themselves — of making mysteries —"

"Come, you have not yet got rid of your bad thoughts; as if I could not read them in your eyes! You promised to have entire confidence in me!"

"It seems to me I am proving that I have it at this moment."

"By looking cross because you did not find me when you came here this morning! Come, my dear, let us reason a little; we must be logical. If I do not love you I am not obliged to tell you I do, to feign feelings which I do not experience, to deceive you, in fact, am I? Come, why don't you answer me?"

Instead of answering, Adhémar rose, walked

about the room, sat down to the piano and drummed upon it, beginning waltzes, polkas, mazurkas, then he kissed Nathalie, saying,—

"Pardon me, dearest, I slept ill, last night. I have a bit of a headache, and that is what made me seem sulky to you."

Nathalie pretended to believe this and harmony was re-established, apparently at least, for in the depths of his heart Adhémar felt troubled; he thought of these frequent morning journeys, for which visiting Juliette was the pretext, and he said to himself, "She used not to go out so often, and she would always tell me when she intended to go."

Several days passed; Adhémar often changed the hour of his visits, but Madame Dermont was always at home; he began to feel a little more tranquil. However, under the influence of that jealousy which, in him, always accompanied true love, it happened more than once, after he left Nathalie's, that he walked up and down in the street for a long time, or placed himself under a neighboring gateway to see if his mistress did not go out directly he left her; but he had his trouble for his pains, at which he was of course delighted.

One morning before nine o'clock the idea came to him to take a turn in the street where Madame Dermont lived. "I shall not show myself at her house," he said to himself; "she gets up late, and I should risk disturbing her slumber—but perhaps I shall see her servant go out and I shall charge her

with a pretty bunch of flowers that I am going to buy for her mistress. Nathalie will find them before her when she wakes, and she will suspect well where they come from."

Adhémar dressed hastily and went and bought a handsome bouquet in the Passage Verdeau. Then he went to the Rue de Paradis-Poissonière, arrived in front of the house where Madame Dermont dwelt, looked at the windows, of which all the shutters were as yet closed, and walked up and down the street, looking at his watch, which marked the half hour after nine. It was too soon to go up to Nathalie's, but he hoped that the servant would come out.

Ten minutes rolled by; Madame Dermont's servant had not appeared. Adhémar was tired of walking in the street with his bouquet in his hand. He had almost decided to go up, saying to himself, "I will ring very gently, so as not to awaken her," when a cab came very fast in his direction, and slackened speed as it neared Madame Dermont's dwelling. Without being able to give any reason for it, Adhémar drew a little aside. Something told him that the cab was interesting to him, and he wanted to see who alighted from it.

The cab stopped in front of Nathalie's gate, a young lady got out of it, paid the cabman, and hastened into the house. But this woman Adhémar recognized; there was no mistaking her, he had seen her features, he had recognized her dress, the

hat which she wore of a morning when she went out — it was she, it was Nathalie. For an instant Adhémar was on the point of running after her and calling to her,—

"Where do you come from?"

But he thought that she might again lie to him; a better idea came to him. The cab was still there, the cabby was about to mount to his box again; Adhémar ran to him, opened the door, threw himself into the vehicle, and taking ten francs from his pocket put it in the cabby's hand as he asked where he was to go. The man was quite surprised that the gentleman should give him ten francs before he had employed him; he said,—

"It will be a long trip, then, we are going into the country no doubt, boss."

"These ten francs are to pay you for simply answering some questions. A lady has just got out of your cab?"

"Yes, boss, a pretty little woman — the right kind. I know them when I see them!"

"Where did you take her?"

"Where did I take her? why, here, boss, an hour and a quarter or so ago, it didn't quite make the half hour, but the little lady paid me generously without bargaining."

"Then she took you by the hour on leaving here?"

"That's correct."

"And where did you carry her? don't lie to me."

"You pay too well for me to lie to you! besides, it's no secret. I took the lady to the Jardin des Plantes."

"To the Jardin des Plantes?"

"Yes, boss, in front of the railing at the water's edge. She got down there and she told me to wait, and then she went into the garden."

"Alone?"

"Yes, yes, alone when she went in, but when she came back, at the end of a good quarter of an hour, she was not alone."

"Who was with her?"

"A gentleman — a young man."

"A young man — what was he like? his dress? his features?"

"Excuse me, but you can imagine I didn't take his photograph — he was dressed, like everyone else, in a sack coat, he seemed a nice enough fellow to me. That's all I can tell you."

"And this man — this gentleman, this sack-coated individual, he came back with the lady, you say? he gave her his arm?"

"Ah, that I can't swear to, I was on my seat and I didn't see them till they were right beside my carriage, where the young man helped the lady in."

"And got in with her?"

"No, no, he didn't get in — not he; he said good-by."

"How did he say good-by? Did he kiss her? did he kiss her hand?"

"By jingo! I was fixing my reins and I didn't see them kiss. The lady called to me, 'Take me back where we started from,' the young man shut the door, and went off — only, yes, I remember that in leaving he said to the young lady, 'Thank you! thank you a thousand times for coming!' Now, boss, where do you want me to drive you?"

"To the Jardin des Plantes, to the same place where this lady got down."

Adhémar, his head burning, his heart beating violently, put his hands to his forehead, exclaiming,—

"It is quite certain now that she also has deceived me; and she dared to tell me that she loved me! Ah, people don't deceive those they love. It is ended, quite ended, this time. I will see her no more, for she will lie to me again; she will forge stories to make me think she is innocent. And I shall perhaps be foolish enough to place faith in her words. Why, no, I will not be her dupe again. I will see her no more. But this man with whom she makes appointments so early in the morning. Ah, if I could but know him — I would kill him; however, it is not he who is guilty; he loves her — but not as I love her!"

Glancing around him, Adhémar perceived a handkerchief at his feet; he picked it up, examined it, recognized Nathalie's initial, which he had seen her embroider herself; he pressed the handkerchief in his nervous hands, muttering,—

"She was so preoccupied that she forgot her handkerchief. Just now she was here, in this place — and she was thinking of some one else."

He could no longer master his sorrow, his sobs came fast, his tears rolled down his cheeks, but he still felt it pleasurable to wipe them with that handkerchief which belonged to her.

The cab stopped and the cabby opened the door, saying,—

"Boss, this is exactly the place where the little lady got down, and where I waited for her — this is the Jardin des Plantes."

Adhémar, plunged in his reflections, in his memories, did not know where he was, or where he was going. The cabby's words recalled him to himself. He jumped quickly out of the cab, then he said to the man,—

"You will come with me."

"Where to, boss?"

"Into the Jardin des Plantes."

"Vehicles can't go in there; it is forbidden."

"I wasn't talking about your cab; I only need you; we'll walk about the gardens, you will look attentively at all the men you see, and if you recognize the one who brought the lady to your cab, you will point him out to me immediately."

The cabby began to laugh as he answered,—

"Come now, that's a good one! You want me to follow you on foot; and my cab and my horses — what's to become of them while I am gone?"

"By Jove! they aren't likely to fly away! you go and put your cab down there where those others are standing."

"That can't be, boss, it is against orders for us to lose sight of our cabs or horses; I should be punished — have my license taken away."

Adhémar took another ten francs from his pocket and put them in the cabby's hand, saying,—

"Only a few turns in the garden — during your absence one of your comrades down there will look after your horses."

Money always produces its effect, the cabman was mollified, then he exclaimed,—

"I'll go and ask Jérôme, he's down there, I think he'll watch my horses, if I share my ten francs with him; will that do, boss?"

"Yes, yes, wait, here are a hundred sous you can give him. Go! quick!"

"Oh, Jérôme's a good fellow, he'll be willing."

The cabby drove to the cab stand, told his comrade what he wanted, and showed him the last hundred sous he had received, saying, "We'll eat that together, you and I, presently." Jérôme accepted, the cabby pocketed the hundred sous and came back to Adhémar, saying,—

"Here I am! it is settled. Jérôme will have an eye to my beasts."

"Then come with me."

They went into the garden. The coachman walked beside Adhémar, who said to him,—

"Look well at all the men, the young men, and as soon as you recognize the one who brought this lady, say to me, 'Here he is.'"

"Yes, boss, or rather, I will cough to warn you."

"That is understood."

There were very few people in the garden. Adhémar hastened his steps; the cabman could hardly keep up with him and said,—

"Dang it! why, you go as fast as my horses!"

A young man passed near them, the cabman began to cough.

"Well," cried Adhémar, stopping.

"That isn't the one, boss."

"Why the devil did you cough then?"

"Why, to warn you that it wasn't him."

They set off walking again. They met several young men, but the cabman did not cough again, only he said from time to time,—

"But if Jérôme should get a fare, who will watch my horses for me?"

Then, after pausing for a moment, he said to Adhémar,—

"Wait, monsieur, I ought to confess something."

"What is that?"

"It is that if I should not recognize the individual you are looking for, it will be because I hardly looked at him, hardly saw him, and I don't even know if he was light or dark."

Adhémar stamped his foot impatiently, and, realizing fully that his search would be fruitless,

decided to leave the garden. The cabby uttered an exclamation of joy on seeing his friend Jérôme still in his place, and said to the person who had paid him,—

"Where shall I drive you to now, monsieur?"

"Nowhere, thank you. I have no further need of you."

In his present state of mind Adhémar preferred walking to getting into the cab again. He needed air and exercise and walked quickly, often without even looking before him; he reached his dwelling, however, and had hardly got in when he hurried to his desk, saying,—

"I will write to her, I must not delay telling her that I am aware of her treachery. Then all will be over. I must try to forget her."

And with a feverish hand, which his thoughts impelled to fly over the paper, he wrote Nathalie the following note,—

Madame, you can no longer deceive me; this time I have seen with my own eyes that you devote to another the time you pass away from me. And you tell me I am wrong to be jealous! Your treachery is unworthy of you. Why did you not say frankly that you had ceased to love me—but women will never be frank. It is their nature to deceive. I knew this, and I should not have believed you. Good-by, madame, and this time it is indeed forever.

After signing and sealing this letter, Adhémar called a messenger and ordered him to give the missive to the person to whom it was addressed,

and to come away immediately, saying that there was no answer.

Then, throwing himself into an easy chair, and resting his head on his hand, he remained plunged in his reflections and muttered, "Oh, if only I could forget her!"

CHAPTER XIV

Monsieur Seringat's Secret

Disinherited by his aunt, and possessing as his whole fortune barely a hundred francs, Dodichet should have sought an occupation which would have procured him the means of existence; instead of that he went to buy tobacco, cigars, went into a café to have some beer, then got into a cab and had himself driven to the Rue Saint-Jacques, where he stopped in front of the so-called hotel where he had left M. Seringat; on the way he said to himself,—

"I must again have recourse to this idiot; it is vexatious, for I already owe him a thousand crowns, and now I can't see an inheritance in the future, by means of which I can pay him — but then, no one knows, the public will not be so hard to me everywhere as they were at Quimper-Corentin. My voice will come back. I'll put myself on a diet of yolks of eggs and egg flip; and meanwhile, Seringat can very well lend me a thousand crowns; he is rich. If he were not rich, I would ask nothing of him — if only for the reason that he would have nothing to give me. But he himself said to me, as we were talking, that he possessed twelve

thousand francs income. The idiot! he might be so happy with that, and to think that he's hiding because he's afraid that they'll recognize him, and all because his wife — really it's unbelievable! I am sure there is not his equal in Paris."

Dodichet sent away his cab when he reached the old house; he crossed the courtyard, and at the end of it, on the groundfloor, found the proprietor, who was also the portress and the hostess of the hotel; this lady multiplied her occupations that she might increase her profits; at this moment she was preparing snails à la provençale, first taking them out of their shells, filling the latter with a forcemeat strongly seasoned with garlic, then putting back the univalve in the shell, and simmering the whole over a slow fire.

"Why, that smells good," said Dodichet as he entered; "ah, you are cooking snails, madame."

"Yes, monsieur, and I dare to assert they will be delicious."

"I am not very fond of snails myself; I think that when they are cooked they are exactly like India-rubber; however, they have a very seductive smell."

"They are cooked à la provençale. If monsieur desires a portion, it costs six sous, that is not dear."

"By Jove, no! and one has to come to the top of the Rue Saint-Jacques to find a well-cooked dish at that price, in Paris. Put a portion on one side for me. I'll eat them when I have my friend

Miflorès. For I think Miflorès is at home, isn't he? and I'll go up to him."

The landlady dropped a snail she was just going to finish; she looked at Dodichet with a tragic expression and cried,—

"Stop, monsieur, don't go up! it is useless — you won't find M. Miflorès."

"He's gone out. Oh, well, then I'll wait for him, and eat my snails at once, he won't be long out, I think."

"Excuse me, monsieur, but I can assure you that he will not come in again!"

"What, he won't come in again? Has he moved then? What does this mean?"

"You don't know what has happened then, monsieur?"

"Hang it, madame, if I knew what had happened, I shouldn't ask you!"

"Well, then, monsieur, I'll tell you all that has passed. But permit me first to pick up the snail I dropped."

"That's right — it will cook with the others."

"Fire purifies everything, monsieur. I have it. It will be exactly a fortnight tomorrow since a gentleman, middle-aged, very well dressed, and very jovial-looking, came to my hotel, followed by a porter bearing his luggage. He asked for a comfortable room and announced that he expected to spend a couple of weeks in Paris, where he had come to amuse himself and take a holiday from

and he gave me his name—Jacques Ron-
good! I installed this gentleman in a
the first floor which looks on to this court-
soon went out and did not return till very
The next morning your friend, M. Miflorès,
out, according to his custom, to walk about a
before breakfast. Hardly had he gone when
new lodger, M. Ronflard, came down from his
and said to me,—

"'Confound it, you have some one I know here; I've just seen him through the window. I recognized him perfectly. I am delighted to meet him in the same hotel — he's one of my friends, is this dear Seringat, and from Pontoise like myself.' I looked at the gentleman and I answered,—

"'Why, monsieur, you are mistaken, I have *no* one at the hotel, called Seringat.'

"'Excuse me, madame, for I have just this moment seen him leave this house.'

"'The gentleman whom you saw leaving the house is called Miflorès, and not Seringat, and he has never said that he came from Pontoise.'

"'Madame, he has apparently thought fit to change his name, but I am perfectly sure that the individual who has just gone out is named Seringat, a former dispensing chemist at Pontoise. Hang it! I know him well, I have often bought powder of him to destroy bedbugs. Poor Seringat, poor chap, he has been much tried. His wife—you know what I mean? The whole town knew it;

they even made a song on him. Wait, I remember a verse of it, it went to the tune of the "Bells of Dunkirk,"' and thereupon the gentleman started off singing,—

Seringat of Pontoise !
He made such a noise,
That all the town knew
That his wife was untrue !

Then he went up to his room again, saying to me, 'As a proof that what I say is true, I shall throw myself in his arms when he returns. Do me the kindness to tell me when he is coming.'

"This gentleman went up to his room again and, to tell you the truth, I was quite indifferent as to whether the gentleman was or was not the hero of the song. At the end of a quarter of an hour M. Miflorès came in. As soon as I saw him, the first thing I did was to say to him, 'Monsieur, is it true that your name is Seringat? and that you come from Pontoise? There's a gentleman here in the house who says he recognizes you. He even knows a song about you. He begged me to let him know when you came in.' Thereupon I saw the poor gentleman change color, roll his eyes, and clench his fists, as he said to me,—

"'Madame, I forbid you to let this gentleman know I have come in. Have my bill made out, I'll go up and get my effects and leave this hotel immediately.'

"I promised him to say nothing to the other,

but he would not listen to me, he went up to his room, got his valise, came down, paid me, and departed. But from his window M. Ronflard had seen him go out. He came down exclaiming,—

"'What! he's gone? he did not wait for me? Oh, well, I'll soon catch up with him.'

"And he went out to try and rejoin his friend. He saw M. Miflorès in front of him, but the latter turned and, seeing that he was followed, he set off running as if the devil was after him. M. Ronflard was stubborn and followed, and it seems he shouted after him, 'You can't escape like this, Seringat; it's Ronflard; don't you recognize me?'

"The gentlemen from Pontoise ran faster than ever. Some one who saw them both running in the street told me that he thought they were going to look for the firemen. In short, M. Miflorès had reached the water's edge, he went on to the bank and saw a boatman going down the river, to whom he made a sign that he would like to get aboard his boat. The boatman came in to the bank and threw a plank that he might cross to the boat. At this moment M. Ronflard approached the person he was pursuing, and began to sing at the top of his voice,—

Seringat of Pontoise!
He made such a noise,
That all the town knew
That his wife was untrue!

"Hardly had he heard this song when poor

M. Miflorès darted on the plank, that he might reach the vessel. But his foot slipped, and he fell into the water. The current carried him along, he could not swim. When they managed to fish him out he no longer lived, he was dead!"

"Dead! — he was dead! Poor Seringat, for that was really his true name. Well, it must be confessed that M. Ronflard made a nice mess of it."

"Why, monsieur, it seems he was so grieved at it that it gave him a jaundice and it was only yesterday that he left Paris. He said, as he left, 'I'm going to inform Madame Seringat that she is a widow, and I'm sure that she won't be so put out about it as I am.'"

Dodichet remained for some moments under the impression of the news he had received. Then he seated himself at the table, saying,—

"Madame, will you give me my dish of snails, with some bread and some wine, for my not eating them will not restore poor Seringat to life, a good reason why I would just as soon eat them."

The hostess hastened to serve Dodichet, and remained near him to engage in conversation, which was the sweetest pastime for this lady. Dodichet heaved from time to time a slight sigh, but he lost no time from his repast.

"Does monsieur find my snails to his taste?"

"Very good, madame; perfectly cooked. You almost make me like this kind of shell food — and forget the loss I have had. Poor Seringat!"

"Did monsieur lose much by his death?"

"Yes; I really lost everything I had in prospect."

"This gentleman owed you money, then?"

"No, not exactly. But it comes to the same thing."

"You will have recourse to the wife — to your friend's widow?"

"No, I have not the slightest claim on her. Nothing remains for me now but to give a last sigh to the defunct and turn to something else. How much do I owe you, madame?"

"Monsieur, the dish, the wine, and the bread, come all together to sixteen sous."

"Well, upon my honor that isn't dear. When I want to feast a mistress, I shall bring her here, and I'm more likely to do so because I don't see any prospect of a dinner at Brébant's."

Dodichet paid his score and left the old hotel which he had previously thought so bad, and which now he was not sorry to know of, for he regarded it as a resource in adversity. He betook himself to Boulotte's. The wine he had drunk with his snails had not been strong enough to go to his head, and he reflected on his position. The two events which had so suddenly happened to him one after the other had destroyed all his hopes, and rendered his present very precarious. However, he would not let himself be cast down, his care-free disposition prevented his disquieting himself about the

future. These are the happiest dispositions, so some people assert. Such men as this are never bilious, and see everything through rose-colored spectacles. I am not of that opinion; to be care-free, happy-go-lucky, is disorderly, and disorder is ruin; that is the result of these happy dispositions.

When Dodichet arrived at the young dancer's she was not making mineral rouge from bricks, but she was making a pretty tracery of blue veins on her temples with indigo. When she saw her lover she threw aside her paint-brush and ran to kiss him, exclaiming,—

"Here you are! oh, how pleased I am. Tell me about your début, your success. You must have received crowns, made conquests. You were so handsome as Joconde. How many times were you called before the curtain?"

Dodichet threw himself on a chair and answered,—

"They recalled me, it is true, but I did not wish to re-appear, because they wanted to do me an ill turn, and I had barely time to escape in a fireman's helmet and a gendarme's cloak."

"What are you telling me now? Was it some farce you were playing?"

"Yes, but it was against me; the public of Quimper hissed at me, sent me to the bears, but I turned round and showed them the other side of my face. Thereupon shouts, scandal, rumpus; and, as I told you before, I had barely time to save myself."

"Is it possible? and your pretty costume?"

"I resold it on the way home, that I might get myself a pair of trousers and a sack coat."

"So that's how you made your first appearance. Well, I suppose you'll have to begin all over again?"

"Thank you, I have no desire to begin over again, in the same line. My voice will never come back."

"Ah, you smoke too much, I told you so! Fortunately your aunt is dead. Some one who knows you told me."

"Yes, my aunt is dead, that's true, but she has disinherited me."

"Oh, my poor friend! what a piece of hard luck. But, thank heaven, you've still got your gold mine — that gentleman who can't refuse you when you want to borrow of him — the man of the secret."

"My darling, the man with the secret has done the same as my aunt; that is to say, he hasn't disinherited me, but he is dead also."

"Good heavens! — was it because some one spoke to him of Pontoise?"

"They did more, they sang a song to him that was composed on him in Pontoise, and in which they made game of his misfortune, for now I may really tell you what that idiot feared so much to have known. The noble Seringat had a very pretty wife, and he thought her a Lucretia. This gentleman had an unfortunate habit of making game of husbands whose wives betrayed them, and of laughing at their expense, declaring loudly that such a

thing could never happen to him. But on a certain day at a fête, our Seringat saw a veiled lady at a distance glide in the dusk of the evening into an isolated tent. Feeling assured that the lady he had seen was the wife of one of the prominent men of the town, Seringat got several young men together, imparted to them his discovery, and led them to the tent, which was not lighted; but into which these gentlemen took several torches, under the pretext of lighting it. What did they find there? Why, Madame Seringat in criminal conversation with a young officer. Who was crestfallen? who was ashamed now? Why, this Seringat; for all the husbands of Pontoise took their revenge, and before the night was over his adventure was being sung all over the place. Seringat, vexed at himself and furious at being himself that which he had always made fun of, the next day left Pontoise, swearing he would never go back. He made people call him Miflorès, and they could get anything they wanted of him when they recognized him or threatened to divulge his name and his adventure. And he perished at last because a gentleman from Pontoise ran after him calling him by his right name and singing after him a verse which dwelt on his misfortune. In his haste to escape, Seringat, who wanted to board a vessel, made a misstep, fell into the river, and was drowned. You know now, my dear, why this gentleman lent me money. He had so much self-respect, he was so vexed at

wearing a pair of horns, that one had but to threaten to divulge all this to obtain all that one wished."

"Good gracious! what an idea! What a simpleton he was to throw himself into the water for fear they should know that his wife was unfaithful. What are you going to do now, Dodichet?"

"Tomorrow I'll go and see the agent for the theatres. I'll tell him that now I play in dramas, the leading parts, like Frédérick-Lemaitre, Melingue and Dumaine; he will soon find me an engagement in some big town."

"You are sure you have talent, then?"

"By Jove! one always has talents; it's only a question of finding them. Look you, something tells me I have dramatic talent within me."

"And you want to make it come out?"

"I wish to find at last my true vocation. After all, I still have a little money left in my pockets, I can take you to dear Bonvalet's; on the way I will buy several play books, and this evening I will learn by heart some of the leading parts."

"The idea!" said Boulotte, putting on her little bonnet, "this evening you will smoke."

CHAPTER XV

The End of the Year. Little Streams

Having firmly resolved that he would not see Madame Dermont again, Adhémar, not knowing how to resist the inclination he felt to seek her, to see her, even if it was but from afar, suddenly got the idea of going to England. He hardly gave himself time to pack a few things into his valise, he put a sufficient sum in his purse, and flew to the railway which led to Boulogne; from there he soon made the passage; he believed he should escape his memories in leaving his country, and hastened to London.

He passed six weeks there, which seemed six years in duration; he did his best to fall in love with an Englishwoman, but could not manage it, and returned at length to Paris, saying to himself, "I think it would be easier for me to fall in love with a Parisian; besides, now it is ended, I think no more of Nathalie; for her part she no doubt goes with the young man she went to meet in the Jardin des Plantes. Oh, hereafter the sight of her will not produce the slightest impression upon me, and I can meet her without a fluctuation of the heart. I love her no longer."

However, on reaching Paris, Adhémar's first care was to go and look at the window of her whom he pretended to no longer love. He walked up and down for a long time before her dwelling, examined all those who went in or came out, and at length returned home saying, "It is the force of habit and will soon pass." And for a week he continued his promenades in the Rue de Paradis-Poissonnière. The ninth day, while taking the same way, he remembered that it was exactly a year since he had found himself with his three friends in the café which was on the corner of the boulevard and the Faubourg Poissonnière, and that all four of them had appointed to meet there at the end of a year. So, changing his path, he turned towards the café, curious to learn if his friends would also remember the appointment, and seizing every occasion which might distract him from his one thought.

On entering the café, Adhemar saw Philémon Dubotté, who was solacing himself with some hot spirits and water and a paper, and who extended his hand exclaiming,—

"Bravo! here are two men of their word! two men who have some memory. Oh, I never had the slightest doubt about you, my dear fellow! How are you? I think you are rather pale — did not the London air agree with you? for you've just got back from England, they tell me."

"Yes, the London air is not quite clear. It is composed in great part of smoke and fog; how-

ever, it is not malarial, the vicinity of the sea drives away bad vapors."

"Did you make any conquests there? that goes without saying, however."

"Indeed, I had not the slightest intrigue."

"You astonish me. I have counted on going to England myself, expressly to learn how the English make love."

"Beware! the English take it much more seriously than do the French."

"Meanwhile, you see before you, my dear Adhémar, the happiest man in Paris. I have succeeded in all my desires. I am the chief of an office, the position for which I was ambitious — and as a husband I have now nothing more to desire. My wife was perfectly foolish in her love for me, she would have liked to be continually hanging on my arm. I have corrected her of this ridiculous desire; now, she lets me go out as much as I wish; sometimes, even, she is the first to invite me to do so — there's a young man who comes to play cards with her, who takes her to the play and out walking. I had some trouble in getting her used to that, but now the thing goes of itself, and it leaves me as much liberty as I can wish for. Well, now, Adhémar, haven't I steered my bark well? Congratulate me, why don't you?"

Adhémar who had smiled in a rather equivocal fashion while the handsome fair man was boasting of his good fortune, hastened to answer,—

"You have got where you wished to be, Dubotte, and since you are content I can do nothing, in fact, but congratulate you."

"Confound it! I should be hard to please if I were not content. You, my dear fellow, must be so also, for you are always successful and you earn a great deal of money."

"Happiness does not always come from money."

"And the other two comrades, have you any news of them?"

"No, not since I left Paris."

"Between ourselves, I fear that poor Dodichet has turned out badly. That young fellow allowed himself some jokes of rather too risky a nature sometimes. I found him one day at that poor Mirotaine's; he had brought with him a pretended suitor, I recognized in the latter an apothecary of Pontoise who was very happily married. Then there was confusion, deception, revolution—a very ugly joke indeed!"

"Some one told me about that business. Yes, Dodichet squanders his life in the effort to invent jokes which provoke laughter for the moment, but which never result advantageously for those who play them."

"I am sorry for it, for at bottom Dodichet is a good fellow."

"A good fellow! People think they have said everything when they exclaim, in speaking of some one, 'He's a good fellow, a rattling good fellow.'

But I think that epithet nearly always indicates a person with whom one would do well to avoid any intimate connection, for the 'good fellow' is constantly doing something foolish; he spends his money recklessly, and when it is gone thinks it perfectly natural to borrow and never return what he borrows. He owes his tailor, his shoemaker, and all his tradespeople. He has no longer a sou in his pocket, but if you propose a party of pleasure he always accepts and obliges you to pay for him. Sometimes, even, it is he who invites you to dine at one of the best restaurants in Paris, treats you splendidly, spares neither truffles nor champagne; but when it is a question of paying the bill, which mounts up to forty francs, can only find fifty sous in his purse and begs you to advance him the rest; in fact, he will ally himself with the first comer, and sometimes finds himself playing billiards with thieves, because he is so confiding that he calls people his friends whose name he hardly knows; he has no conversation, lulls himself incessantly with chimerical illusions, flatters himself that later on he will make millions, and has not what will buy him a breakfast. That is what a good fellow is; frankly, I prefer a bad one."

As Adhémar finished speaking, a gentleman, very meanly dressed, his body squeezed in an old greenish sack coat, buttoned up to the chin; wearing a black tie which barely allowed the merest tip of his collar to be seen, and an old bowler hat that

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was almost void of brim, and shod with trodden down and muddy boots, came into the café, limping badly, and stopped in front of the two talkers, saying,—

"Well, don't you recognize me? Here I am, faithful to the appointment we made last year."

"Dodichet!" exclaimed Adhémar and Dubotté together.

"Yes, gentlemen, Dodichet; a little deteriorated and extremely shabby, as you may see, but still ready to laugh when occasion offers."

"Why, you limp, it seems to me."

"Yes, by Jove! yes, I limp and hereafter, that is to say for the rest of my life, I shall always limp — that is the result of a foolish attempt that I will tell you about presently. But make room for me at your table."

"Willingly; will you have some grog or some beer?"

"Thank you, if it is all the same to you, I would rather have a beefsteak."

"Waiter, a beefsteak for this gentleman."

"With plenty of potatoes."

They served Dodichet, who, with his beefsteak, swallowed two rolls and emptied three small decanters; it was evident that the poor fellow had need of refreshment. His two old friends respected his appetite and refrained from questioning him — until he had finished his repast.

"Gentlemen," said Dodichet, "having been dis-

They served Dolt her, who, with his beefsteak, swallowed two rolls and emptied three small decanters.

OLIVIAN FRIEDMAN JOHNSON

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inherited by my aunt, and that idiot of a Seringat having allowed himself to fall into the water in fleeing from one of his friends, who was singing a ballad made to celebrate his conjugal misfortune, I had to make up my mind to do something. I told you the theatre was my vocation. I think so still, but I must confess that I did not win applause as a tenor — I had smoked too much on the day of my first appearance; in short, I was not fortunate at Quimper-Corentin.

"On my return to Paris, the dramatic agent to whom I announced that I wished to play the Frédérick-Lemaîtres, told me to go as quickly as possible to Carpentras, where the person who played the leading parts had overdone himself in running after an individual who owed him three francs fifty centimes. I went to Carpentras, and presented myself to the manager with all the assurance of which I am capable; he welcomed me with joy, and said to me, 'We want to give an extraordinary representation tomorrow, for the benefit of nurses who have no nurslings; I want to play "Thirty years; or the life of a gambler," and to cap it all, I have a young man of Pithiviers, who makes perilous leaps, as good as Leotard's. Can you take the part of Frédérick in "Thirty Years"?' 'I can take it immediately, if you like,' said I, laughing; 'be easy, I have it at my fingers' ends.' I lied a bit, but as I had seen the piece very often I said to myself, 'I know the entries and the exits, that's

the principal thing. When the dialogue escapes me I will express myself by pantomime, or I'll try to find something to say that relates to the situation.' The manager was delighted, he announced his extraordinary representation, as well as my début and that of the second Leotard.

"The time for the play arrived, the theatre was full, the receipts fabulous for the locality. We played 'Thirty Years.' I did not know a word of Georges' part — well, I played it like an angel. The natives of the place did not know the play and so did not suspect that I substituted my prose for that of the author; my comrades opened their eyes wide, but when they did not respond, I urged them so well that they were obliged to speak. In short, the play ended with a great burst of applause; I was recalled, clapped, acclaimed. The manager kissed me, and told me I was engaged.

"At this moment some one brought him a letter, it was from his acrobat, and informed him that the latter had been recalled to Pithiviers by his father, to fill an extraordinary order for pies, and that he must depart on the instant. Here was my manager at his wits' end; he had promised some acts on the trapeze, the public expected them; if he did not give them they could demand their money back, and he would have done anything in the world rather than give it back. I saw the manager's embarrassment and I made him explain to me what the acrobat had to do. His act consisted of run-

ning and jumping through a hoop, bursting the paper, then to go high enough to catch a cord that was hanging further on. 'Is that all?' said I, laughing, to the manager, 'why, it's as simple as the asses' bridge! I've done a great deal more than that when I was amusing myself at the gymnasium. Calm yourself, give me the customary tights and fleshings and I'll do some gymnastics that will quite come up to those of your tumbler from Pithiviers.'

"The manager fell on my neck and promised that he would double my salary, which did not commit him to much, since he had not as yet made me any offer; then he went to tell the orchestra to play the Tartar's march while I was dressing, and after that he made an announcement to the public. He advanced, bowed and announced that his tumbler had been suddenly taken ill, and that the actor who had just played the part of Georges would replace him. Everybody lauded me to the skies; they said among themselves, 'What a man! he enacts at the same time Frédérick-Lemaîtres and Leotard.'

"During this time I was struggling horribly to get into the flesh-colored tights which belonged to the tumbler. I had a good deal of trouble to manage it for they were terribly narrow for my rotundity, but at last I got them on. They struck the three blows, the orchestra played me the triomphe of 'la Muette,' I appeared; they overwhelmed me with applause. To show at once my elasticity, I made

three culverts, one after the other, before the public; at the third one I tore my tights terribly, and I showed not only my elasticity but somewhat of my skin, but that did not stop me, and the public, who thought that I had another costume beneath my fleshings, and that I was changing in sight, redoubled its applause. That excited me, animated me. I ran to the trapeze, I broke through the hoop and passed through it; but, in thinking to catch the cord later on, I jumped too high and only seized a wing which I dragged down with me to the stage, and in falling I injured my knee, that finished the spectacle.

"I must render justice to the director; it was in obliging him that I was hurt, he cared for me, and the surgeon did his work so well that I shall remain lame all my life. Here was my stage career closed to me at the outset; for one cannot represent Buridan or Kean limping. To indemnify me, the manager offered to employ me as the prompter of the troup. I accepted, though I said to myself; a prompter is not a player; but, since I can no longer play, I must prompt, it is still a situation in the dramatic line; one is not seen by the public, it is true, but one is none the less useful in the play, where one sometimes takes part in all the rôles.

"So here was I, prompter for the troup. I wasn't so badly off, either, for after my accident they gave me a benefit, which was fruitful enough.

"I passed more than a month thus — when —

I must confess it, my fatal mania for playing jokes again took me. We had a young lover who asserted that he never made a mistake in playing; one evening, when I felt like laughing, our lover was on the stage with a princess whom, in the play, he is abducting and when she says to him, with the tears running down her cheeks, 'What are you going to do with me?' he made me a sign to come to his aid, and I prompted him, 'Oh, you bother me!' the unlucky fellow said that to the princess. You may judge of the effect which that produced in the theatre; they laughed, they shouted, they called for it over again; the actress who was playing the princess gave her lover a slap in the face, saying, 'Take that to teach you to address me thus on the stage.'

"The young leading man had some trouble in justifying himself; they knew that I was the only guilty party and the result was my discharge. I came back to Paris, where I was reduced to prompting in a so-called suburban theatre. That is my history — that's where I've got to."

"Confound it! my poor Dodichet," said Dubotté, "it seems to me that that should at last have cured you of your mania for playing jokes."

"What can you expect, handsome Phœbus? it seems that was my real vocation. But here's our fourth comrade coming. Devil take it! he must have got on, for he looks radiant, and he's made as great a change in his dress as in his person."

Lucien Grischard, who now entered the café, was no longer the poor fellow in a threadbare jacket and with a face lengthened by unhappiness and privation, that he formerly was. Today his eyes were sparkling, the expression of his face announced his contentment of mind; his costume, without being that of a dandy, indicated that he was a man in easy circumstances; he smilingly extended his hand to the three persons with whom he had again met, and who were already congratulating him on the happy change in his appearance.

"Good-day, messieurs, good-day," he said, in cheerful accents. "I am the last to keep this appointment, but you will excuse me when you know how busy I am."

"Good-day, Lucien. What we already see, and with joy, is that your position is ameliorated, for you seem happy; that is easily read in your face."

"And why should I not be happy? I am about to marry the one I love. In a week Juliette will be my wife, M. Mirotaine has at last consented to call me his son-in-law. I am at the height of my wishes."

"And how did you manage to arrive there? Tell us all about it."

"By means of work and perseverance. My pins have proved a success, I made money by them; I discovered something else, I made more money still by that; I managed to extend my business. But how was I to make that known to

M. Mirotaine, who had forbidden me his house? That was the difficulty! It was absolutely necessary for me to see Juliette, in order that I might tell her all that I was doing; it was necessary to come to an understanding with her, to give her the exact details of my position, in order that she might be able to say to her father, 'You may go to such and such people, and they will give you information as to Lucien's position.' Fortunately, Juliette possessed a friend who came to our aid. This friend often obtained permission to take Juliette with her, either to the bath or to make purchases, but in reality these ladies came to join me in the Jardin des Plantes, where I would wait for them; there I could arrange with Juliette all that she had to say to her father regarding my position."

"To the Jardin des Plantes," cried Adhémar, "was it there that these ladies used to meet you?"

"Of course, and one day, even, when I had some excellent news to tell Juliette — I had to tell her that I had succeeded in a new commercial enterprise — my sweetheart was rather unwell; and her friend, Madame Dermont, had the kindness to come alone to our meeting place. I told her that I had been successful. She hastened to go and inform Juliette of this happy circumstance, and M. Mirotaine, convinced at length that he was not being imposed upon, that I knew how to make money, reopened the doors of his house to me and consented to grant me his daughter's hand."

Dubotté and Dodichet congratulated Lucien. Adhémar alone said nothing to him, for what he had learned had produced such a revulsion in all his feelings, that he remained as one overwhelmed and had not the strength to speak. However, Dubotté took his hat and rose, saying,—

"Come, I see with satisfaction that we have all reached the situations we aspire to. There is only this poor Dodichet whose position is become worse. But, after all, that is his own fault. No one should prompt, 'Oh, you bother me,' to a lover. All the same, you know my address, Dodichet, and when you find yourself — hard up, come and ask me for a dinner. I have always a place at my table for an unfortunate old friend. Messieurs, excuse me for leaving you, but I must go and see whether Callé can take my wife to the play this evening."

Dubotté had gone. Dodichet prepared to do the same, as he said,—

"No, I shan't go and ask him for a dinner. If I should get too hard up, it is not to him I should go. There are people whose benefactions are too heavy to carry. Good-by, messieurs, I have eleven acts to prompt this evening, I'll go to my post, or to my hole, it is the same thing. I sometimes feel a desire to take a syringe and prompt with that. That would, indeed, be a good joke. I shall wait until they play 'Pourceaugnac.'"

"Dodichet, I don't offer you a dinner," said Lucien, "but I shall never forget that you wanted

to render me a service. If you should find yourself without occupation, come and see me and I shall be able to tell you of some way of making a living."

"Thanks, old fellow; some tobacco with that, and everything will go all right."

"Dodichet," said Adhémar, "my purse is at your disposition."

"I am well aware of it, I know your kindness. But I want to try and depend on myself. Besides, now I like snails, and they are not dear, I want to breed them in my den, and that occupies me between the acts. Good-by, my dear fellows!"

When he was alone with Adhémar, Lucien said to the former,—

"You have not congratulated me on my approaching marriage. You seem very much out of sorts. I know you too well, however, not to be sure that you sympathize in my happiness."

"Yes, Lucien, yes, I do sympathize in it. But if you did but know what it has cost me! It was you whom Madame Dermont went to meet in the Jardin des Plantes?"

"Of course. Juliette could not come on that day."

"Nathalie went in a cab?"

"Yes, and left it at the entrance to the garden; I conducted her as far as the cab, and I rather wanted to get in with her that I might thank her again for her kindness in coming."

"Oh, my dear fellow, if you had told me this sooner, I should not have suspected a woman whom I adore."

"I could not tell you sooner, for you were in England. I could not follow you there. You were angry again, then, with Madame Dermont?"

"Yes, my cursed jealousy. I wrote her a letter which contained nothing sensible. I can see that now very well."

"Console yourself — she will forgive you."

"Oh, no, it is all ended now; she can no longer forgive me, and I am quite aware, besides, that I do not deserve forgiveness."

"Good-by, my dear Adhémar, excuse me for leaving you so abruptly, but Juliette is waiting for me, and I have many preparations to make for our marriage."

"Go, my dear fellow, go. If I am unfortunate, at any rate I don't wish to retard the happiness of others."

Adhémar returned home alone. What he had learned, while proving to him that he had been wrong to suspect Madame Dermont's fidelity, caused him, however, more pleasure than pain; he was sorry, he was grieved, to have failed in his promises, to have had so little confidence in Nathalie's love, but, also, he felt happy, quite happy, to know that she had not deceived him, and that he might say to himself, "She loves me still."

There was something in the midst of his sorrow,

then, that made his heart beat with delight, and which deprived his regret of its bitterness.

Returning to his home, Adhémar tried to work. It is very difficult to write a novel or a play when the heart is entirely occupied, when one thought alone has possession of one's mind. But on reflecting upon what he and his three friends had done during the year, he said to himself, "The proverbs are always right, 'The little streams make the mighty rivers,' for the effect of the little streams must either be for our gain or our loss. Philémon Dubotté had a wife who adored him, who wanted to be hanging on his arm continually; and instead of congratulating himself on his felicity in having found such a phœnix, this gentleman sought on every occasion to go out without his wife, he turned her love into ridicule, he left her of an evening to the company of a young man who was immensely more amiable to this lady than was her husband. All these things were the little streams which led to a result which married people should, on the contrary, try to avoid.

"Lucien Grischard possessed not the slightest fortune; but he had what was more substantial, more solid — courage, perseverance, love of work. By means of patience and privations, he could undertake a small business; he made himself known and appreciated for his probity; little by little he extended his relations, augmented his business, and, diminutive as it was at first, he made it lucrative.

All these little streams led to his end — to fortune. He has well earned it.

"Dodichet had everything to render him happy; sufficient means, health and cheerfulness; but an unfortunate mania, to constantly make game of others, to make jokes and play tricks on his friends and acquaintances, led him on a road where he began by spending all that he had, and ended by living at the expense of others. Unable to behave reasonably in any employment, he even managed to lose his place as a prompter in the provinces, and is now reduced almost to abject poverty by a series of follies accumulated one on the other — and which some day may perhaps lead him to the great river — for this is often the end of these joking humbugs who are so agreeable in company.

"As for myself! ah, I am unfortunate indeed, and I have only myself to blame for it; I had, after a good many light connections, met a woman who was such as I had dreamed of, and I had the happiness of being loved by this woman; I knew, at last, that true love which is so sweet to the heart; that love which so far excels all the intoxicating momentary madnesses in which our youth is involved. I was happy, very happy. But my cursed jealousy would not let me rest. Having been deceived a hundred times by women who did not know how to love, I could not persuade myself that she could be faithful to me. My suspicions were unjust, I had had proof of it several times, but that did not

prevent me from imagining it anew. These offences so often repeated have lost me Nathalie's heart. She forgave me many times, but I can no longer hope that she will pardon me again after that letter which I wrote in my delirium; I was not afraid to write to her that her treachery was unworthy, when she thought of nothing but assuring Juliette's and Lucien's happiness; and I left without seeing her, without even demanding the slightest explanation of her conduct. The fearful effect of jealousy. I had promised to cure myself of it, and instead of that I began all over again. Ah, I did not deserve to be loved sincerely."

And Adhémar, who held his arm on his desk, rested his forehead in his hand and would have remained in that position for a long time, if a little hand had not rested on his shoulder while a well-known voice said in his ear,—

"And yet I love you still, monsieur."

Those accents had touched the poor lover's heart, he raised his head—Nathalie was beside him, she smiled at him, looked as tenderly at him as of old. He uttered an exclamation, he stammered,—

"Is it possible that you can forgive me again?"

"Yes, my dear, of necessity I must. Wait, look here—at your scar—your burn. You see that I must always forgive you!"

"Good God! I fear my happiness is but a dream."

"No, monsieur; Lucien came and told me how

sad and unhappy you were. I thought you had been punished enough and I came. Was I wrong?"

"Oh, you are good! I do not really deserve to be loved thus."

"Are you going to begin over again?"

"Ah, this time, Nathalie, I swear to you."

"Don't swear! Believe me, vows amount to nothing. One can conduct one's self without making any promises."

And now, readers, do you want to know what became of these personages, few though they be, who have figured in this simple study of contemporaneous life?

In the first place Dubotté continued to be — very content; his wife no longer incessantly hung on his arm, she let him go out alone as much as he pleased. Sometimes, even, she was the first to refuse to accompany him, she had acquired a great liking for the game of bezique, and young Callé was always ready to come and play a game with her.

Lucien Grischard, after he became Juliette's husband, did not cease to love his wife and to work; also his business prospered, and they lived in a perpetual honeymoon.

Dodichet, having thought it would be funny to smoke in the den of a little theatre where he was prompting, had set fire to the stage and had been found burned to death as the result of this last joke.

M. Mirotaine, not having found any one who

wanted to come to his parties in the winter, where they served hot liquorice water to the company, decided, for the sole refreshment, to open the windows; but when any one treated him to a dinner or a breakfast at a restaurant, he did not fail to empty the salt cellar and the pepper caster into two little paper cornets which he put in his pocket.

M. Brid'oison continued to be delighted with the agility and skill exhibited by his son in gymnastics. Little Artaban could not enter a drawing-room without making a culvert; and the papa flattered himself that this fashion would be adopted by the ladies.

Madame Putiphar, the dealer in toilet articles, still arranges marriages in the interest, not of young girls, but of second-hand cashmere shawls which she puts in the brides' baskets.

Mademoiselle Boulotte is now trying to make vegetable rouge with — one thing or another.

We all have, here below, our inclinations, our little streams, which lead us, the one towards the good, the other towards the evil. We must try to avoid the latter and to follow those of which the water is pure and the borders flowery; these are the good ones.